

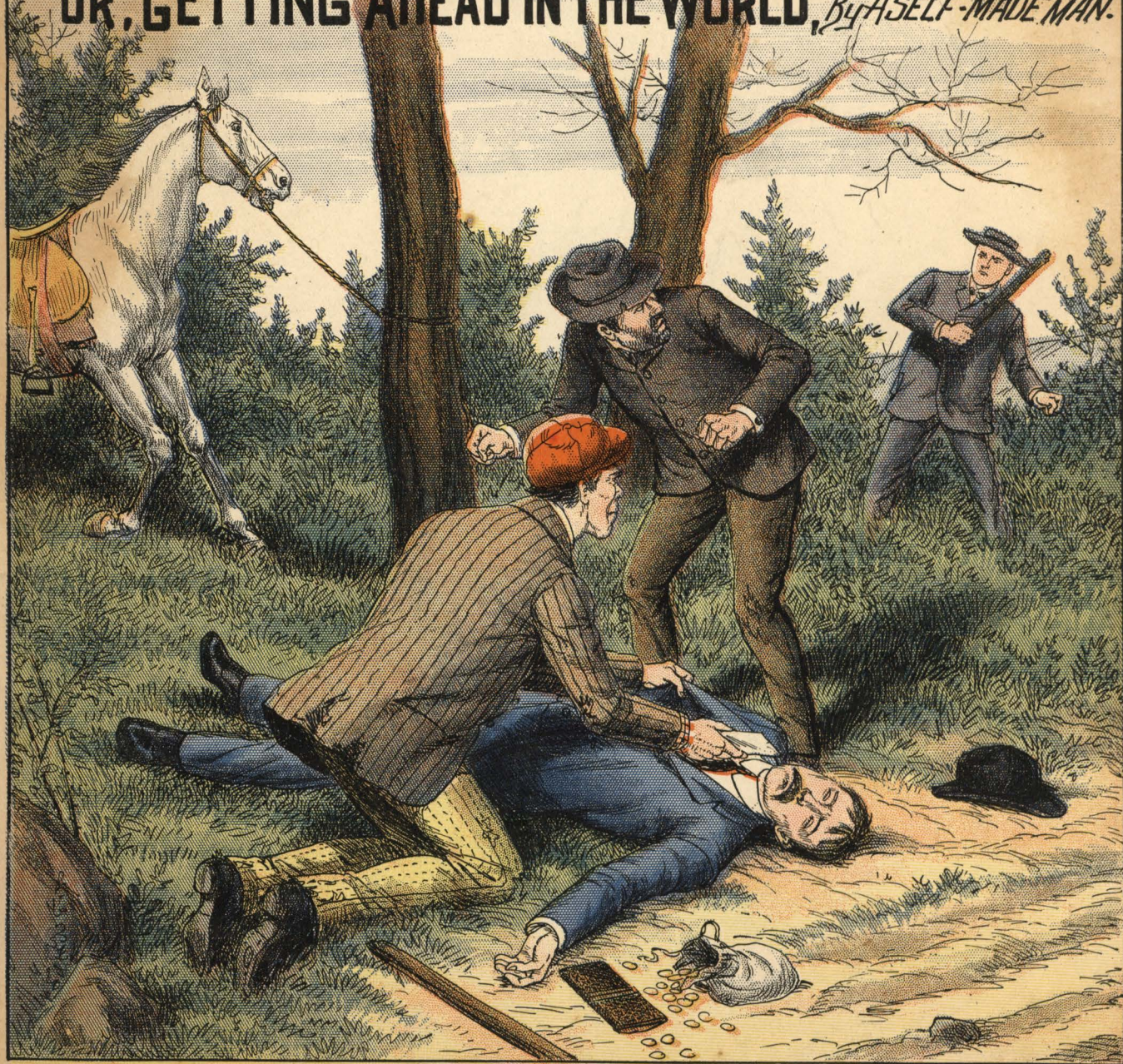
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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

A WIZARD FOR LUCK;
OR, GETTING AHEAD IN THE WORLD, *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



"Hold on, there, you rascals!" shouted Fred, springing from the bushes, club in hand. "What in thunder are you doing? Robbing the man?" The two ruffians paused in their nefarious work and glanced at him in a startled way.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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A Wizard for Luck

OR,

GETTING AHEAD IN THE WORLD

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH FRED SPARKS UNDERTAKES A DESPERATE MISSION.

"Can you get this message through to Boston to-night?"

Fred Sparks looked up from a game of solitaire he was playing to while away the time and saw a portly, well-dressed man, a stranger in the village of Edgecomb, standing outside the counter of his little den which bore the sign of the Western Union Telegraph Co.

"I'm afraid not, sir. The railroad bridge has been carried away by the breaking of a boom above the village, and the wires are down."

The gentleman looked both annoyed and worried by this news.

"Can't you send the message by way of Riverdale? That's on this side of the river and about fifteen miles below."

"No, sir. There is no wire from here to Riverdale. This is only a branch line and goes no further."

"It is a matter of great importance to me to get this message to Boston before the Stock Exchange opens to-morrow morning. Can you ride a horse?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll hire a horse from the stable and give you \$25 for yourself if you'll take the message down to Riverdale and have it sent from there."

"From what I've heard the road to Riverdale is so flooded that it is impassable. At any rate the bridge across the Snake River branch is known to have been destroyed early this morning. It was only a light wooden affair, anyway."

"Couldn't you take a boat, row across the river here and

send a message from some place on the other side? I'll make it worth your while."

The stranger pulled out a well-filled pocketbook and started to open it.

"The nearest office on the other side is at Greenville, six miles away. The river is so swift and high, not to speak of the logs one would be apt to meet, that any one would be risking his life to cross it in a boat," replied Fred.

"Look here, boy, can't I make it an object for you to run the risk? Here is \$100. Come across the street to the hotel. I will put the money in an envelope, and place it in the hands of Mr. Murray, the landlord, with the understanding that if by any means you can send this despatch to my partner in State Street, so that he will receive it before ten o'clock to-morrow morning, the money is yours."

The offer was a munificent one to Fred Sparks, who was only receiving a very small salary as the village operator.

More than that, \$100 was badly needed by his mother just then to meet a payment on the instalment mortgage which rested on the little farm owned by her two miles outside of Edgecomb.

The temptation to make that money and thus relieve his mother's anxiety was irresistible.

Besides, Fred was a plucky boy, and dared attempt what many a man would refuse to undertake.

"I'll take your offer, sir, and do the best I can," he said, sweeping the pack of cards into the drawer of the table on which stood the telegraphic instrument which had been silent ever since the railroad bridge had been partly destroyed by the onslaught of the liberated giants of the forest after the boom gave way.

The gentleman handed him the telegram, and paid the tariff on it from Edgecomb to Boston, after Fred read it and counted the words.

It was addressed to a well-known stock broker in Boston, and related to the purchase of a certain stock.

Fred enclosed it in one of the Western Union envelopes and put it in his pocket, then he glanced at the clock.

It was just five.

Locking up the little office he accompanied the gentleman across the muddy street to the hotel.

Mr. Murray was behind the desk in the office.

The gentleman, whose name Fred now found out was Woodhull, told the landlord of the arrangement he had made with the young telegraph operator, enclosed the \$100 in an envelope and handed it to Mr. Murray to place in his safe.

"Here is a five-dollar bill, my lad, to pay for the boat, and to meet any other expense you may be put to," said the gentleman. "If you get across the river all right, bring back with you a paper signed by the operator at Greenville showing the hour you turned my message over to him. That will be evidence sufficient to entitle you to the \$100."

Fred nodded and walked out of the hotel.

It was a late afternoon in March.

Rain had been falling steadily for three days, and from all parts of the State came reports of frightful damage by flood.

Trains were delayed on all the railroads by washouts; bridges were swept away; farms and villages inundated, and there had been disaster along the seacoast.

Snake River, which flowed by Edgecomb, was swollen to a tremendous volume.

Ordinarily rapid at this point, the water now swept by with great velocity.

Early in the afternoon a boom above the village, containing thousands of logs, gave way, so enormous was the pressure, and the liberated logs came down like battering-rams against the piers of the railroad bridge which spanned the stream.

The slender piers of masonry which supported the graceful steel structure could not resist the impetuous assault.

The two middle ones gave way, forming a broad channel, through which the water and logs poured in a wild torrent.

The telegraph wires over the river were carried away with the bridge, and for the time being Edgecomb was practically cut off from the outside world.

Fred Sparks was a new hand at the telegraph business, his appointment as the village operator dating back just one month.

Fred had been raised on a farm in the neighborhood.

He disliked the work quite as much as did other boys of his age, but love for his widowed mother made him ever faithful in the performance of his share of the labor of the small farm, in which he had long since lost faith as a means to fortune; for despite the industry of himself and his brother John—and they did work hard—the farm only yielded the little family a poor living.

John, the elder brother, modest and unambitious, accepted this lot in life as inevitable, and patiently trudged along the rough way.

But Fred was cast in a different mold.

He was twice as smart as his brother and chock full of ambition to get ahead in the world.

He grew more and more weary of his plodding existence and longed for an opportunity to cut loose from the farm and seek his fortune in some other pasture.

His mother, however, could ill afford to lose his services, and so Fred hung on.

When the opportunity to learn telegraphing was thrown in his way he eagerly embraced it.

He rode to the village every night to take a lesson from the Edgecomb operator and practice on a spare sounder.

When his instructor, who had secured a better position, pronounced him capable of handling the business of the little office, his mother consented to his taking the job, for the money he would be able to turn in would more than pay the wages of a hired man to fill his place on the farm.

So the Western Union Co. hired him on the recommendation of the retiring operator.

The change suited Fred to the queen's taste, for he looked upon it as a stepping-stone to something better.

He had lots of time to himself, and he utilized the bulk of it in adding to the knowledge he had obtained at the district school, for, in his opinion, to be successful in any undertaking one must first possess an education.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH FRED MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF TWO STRANGE MEN.

Fred was strong and sturdy, and perfectly at home in a boat on the river; but to cross that river under the present circumstances was an entirely different proposition to undertaking the same feat when ordinary conditions prevailed.

To reach Greenville in time to put the message through to Boston within the specified limit meant that he must dare the perils of a swollen current in the darkness and in the rain which had come on again.

Furthermore he would have to make the trip alone, for he was satisfied that it would be useless to try and persuade any one in the village to accompany him across.

Such an attempt would be considered foolhardy.

Indeed, he was fully aware of the great risk he was facing, but that \$100 prize was before his eyes.

If he could win it he knew how happy it would make his mother, and for that mother's sake he was prepared to dare anything.

There was a rubber coat, an old slouch hat and a line-man's lantern in the office.

He donned the first two, and taking the lantern in his hand started for the river side to hunt up a serviceable boat.

He consumed half an hour in looking one up and obtaining the reluctant permission of the owner to use it for the sum of one dollar.

When he pushed out into the rapid water he could not see the outlines of the further shore.

The current was so strong that he did not attempt to row straight across, but allowed the boat to drift down stream.

He pulled sturdily at the oars for some time, and then cast frequent glances over his shoulder in expectation of seeing the opposite shore loom up before him.

A little below the village the river widened, and at this

point, now that both banks were more or less overflowed, the distance across was fully three-quarters of a mile.

As the moments passed and the opposite bank failed to appear, he began to grow somewhat alarmed.

The rain was now descending in torrents, and he occasionally shipped water.

Although he had managed thus far to keep the boat right side up, his situation was becoming more uncomfortable all the time, to say the least.

Suddenly a bend in the river brought a light into full view.

It evidently came from some house on the bank he was aiming for.

He hailed its appearance with a thrill of joy.

Heading the boat for a point above it to allow for the force of the current, he rapidly approached it.

At last, completely tired out by his violent and unusual exertions, Fred managed to effect a landing and tie his boat to a tree.

Satisfied that he must be at least a mile below the ruined railroad bridge, and feeling loath to start upon his dreary walk to Greenville across a soggy country, in his wet and exhausted condition, he decided to apply at the house for temporary shelter, hoping he might find a fire before which to warm himself.

Accordingly he stepped up to the door of the building, which was but a small one-story and attic frame affair, and rapped loudly.

Almost instantly the light went out, but no one answered his summons.

He waited a few minutes and knocked again, louder than before.

Still no one came to let him in.

"I guess they don't want to receive callers," he muttered. "It's pretty tough on me if I have to continue on in this shape. I may not strike another house for some time."

Finally he knocked a third time, determined to gain admission if he could, if only for a short spell.

He was on the point of giving the thing up for a bad job when one of the two small windows was cautiously opened and a rough voice inquired who was there.

"I'm a boy from the other side of the river. I've just rowed across. I've got a long walk before me in the rain and I'd like to come inside and rest awhile before going on."

"It's a kid," said the voice to someone behind him. "Says he's just rowed across the river and wants to get under cover for awhile. Shall we let him in?"

Fred couldn't catch what the other person said in reply, but the man at the window closed it, and presently the door was opened and he was told to walk inside.

The room was quite dark, and he could barely see the outlines of the individual who had admitted him.

A match, however, was struck a few feet away, the light flamed up, and soon a lamp standing on a table diffused a cheerful glow around the only real room in the house.

Fred then got a good view of the two persons who appeared to be the occupants of the house.

They were hard-looking fellows, both of them, of about the average height and build.

One wore a soft felt hat and the other a rough cap.

Their garments were somewhat shabby and threadbare, and on the whole they looked pictures of hard luck.

Fred liked their appearance so little that he was sorry they let him in.

"So yer jest came across the river, did yer, young feller?" said the chap who had admitted him, and whose name the boy afterward learned was Jobkins, while his companion's name was Rowley.

"Yes."

"Yer have got a good nerve," said Rowley. "It must have been a matter of importance that fetched yer across. Where did yer come from?"

"Edgecomb."

"Is that the village up the river?"

"Yes."

"What's yer name?"

"Fred Sparks."

"If yer tired why don't yer sit down?"

Fred availed himself of this permission, but he kept a wary eye on the two men, for he had his suspicions of them.

"Where are yer goin' on sich a night as this?"

"Greenville."

"Where is that?"

"About seven miles from here."

"Is it on the railroad?"

"Yes."

"What sort of place is it?"

"It's a large village."

"S'pose we was to foller this river down, what's the next place we'd come to?"

"Glendale."

"How far is that from here?"

"About fifteen miles. It's opposite the town of River-mouth."

"What did yer do with the boat yer come across in?"

"Tied it to a tree outside."

"Expect to go back in it, I s'pose?" said Rowley, with a kind of grin.

"Yes. It belongs to a man in Edgecomb."

"Yer borrowed it, then?"

"I did."

While Fred and the man named Rowley were talking the other chap was cooking some bacon and eggs on the small stove in a pan that looked very much the worse for wear.

He used the blade of a six-inch knife to turn the food.

When the stuff was done to a turn he took a small bundle from a shelf and disclosed a loaf of bread.

With the same knife he cut off three slices and on each placed an egg and some of the bacon.

Then he cut three more slices of bread and placed them over the eggs and bacon.

He handed one of the sandwiches to his associate, a second to Fred, who being quite hungry did not refuse it, and took a third himself.

There were only two boxes in the room, which served as seats, and one of these was held down by Fred.

Rowley occupied the other.

All three ate the simple meal in silence, and when the last morsel had vanished down their throats the men drew flasks from their pockets and washed the food down with a liquor that looked and smelt like whisky.

"Have a drink?" asked Rowley, proffering his flask to Fred.

"I don't drink any kind of spirits," replied the young telegraph operator.

"I reckon it's a bad habit," grinned Rowley, taking another swallow. "Say, what brought yer across the river on sich a night?"

"An errand," replied Fred.

"What kind of an errand?" persisted Rowley.

Fred was not anxious to disclose his business, but the question was too direct for him to evade, so he said:

"I came across to send a telegraphic message from Greenville to Boston."

"Oh, yer did. Ain't there no telegraph office in yer village?"

"There is, but the wires went down with the bridge."

"How much money have yer got about yer?"

"What do you want to know for?" asked Fred, rather startled by this inquiry.

"Well, me and my pal is strapped, and we'd like to borrow it from yer."

"I need whatever money I have. It isn't much, anyway. Still, I'm willing to let you have a dollar for the sandwich and privilege of resting here."

"How much more'n a dollar have yer?"

"Not a great deal more," replied Fred, evasively.

"Well, yer might turn out what yer have on the table. Yer won't need it to-night, 'cause ye're goin' to stay here till mornin'."

"Stay here till morning!" exclaimed Fred. "Oh, no; I've got to hurry on to Greenville right away, because that message must be sent to Boston as soon as possible."

"Sorry to interfere with yer arrangements, but yer've got to stay. We ain't pertic'lar about havin' no visitors afore mornin', which we might have if we let yer go."

"Do you mean to say you intend to detain me against my will?" said Fred, rising.

"I reckon that's what I mean," replied Rowley, coolly.

"You've no right to do that. And I won't stand for it, either," replied Fred, in a resolute tone.

"How are yer goin' to help yerself? We're the bosses of this ranch. We can't afford to let yer go."

"What did you let me in for?" demanded the boy, indignantly.

"To see if yer had any coin in yer clothes. Dump out what yer got, and in the mornin' yer kin go yer way."

Fred's answer was to make a sudden spring for the door.

Jobkins, however, was hovering in that direction, and so Fred didn't get a yard before the rascal seized him with a firm grip and pushed him up to the table.

"Yer didn't git very far, did yer?" chuckled Rowley. "Since yer won't cough up willin'ly I'll have to help yer do it."

Thus speaking he thrust one of his hands into the right pocket of Fred's trousers and fetched up four one-dollar bills.

This was the change Fred had received from the man from whom he had hired the rowboat.

The young operator put up a game struggle to avoid being robbed, but the two men were odds against which he had no show.

"Now, Jobkins, hold him till I get a cord to tie his hands with," said Rowley.

As the rascal rose from his seat a sudden shock struck the house.

The building was lifted bodily from its slight foundation and swept over on an angle of fifteen or twenty degrees.

The table went over with a crash, carrying the lamp with it, the light being extinguished when it struck the floor.

Fred and his captors were thrown in a heap against the base-board of the further wall of the room.

The stove also participated in the general ruin.

It turned over on its side, scattering its blazing embers over the floor in the direction of the wall where Fred and the two rascals were floundering.

The building would have stood a fair show of catching afire but for an inrush of several inches of water which deluged the firebrands and thoroughly drenched the young operator and the two men.

Then the building righted with a wobbly motion, and went sailing down the river at the mercy of the swift current.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH FRED IS TREATED TO AN UNCOMFORTABLE RIDE DOWN THE RIVER.

As Fred, somewhat dazed by the shock he had sustained, struggled on his feet, his head struck against the ladder leading to the attic or loft.

He grasped at it for support, and held on in the dark, wondering what had happened to the house.

His thoughts quickly grappled with the situation, and with a thrill of dismay he realized from the motion of the building that it was afloat on the river.

"My gracious!" he palpitated. "We'll all be drowned like rats in a trap!"

It looked that way, for the water had risen to a good foot on the floor, and he could hear and feel it washing about the room with the swing of the house.

The water was cold and uncomfortable, and as the ladder offered a chance to get away from it, Fred took advantage of it and ran up to the loft.

The opening was fitted with a trap-door which he might easily have closed against the two rascals, but though he had no desire to enjoy their company further, he was not heartless enough to shut them down in the room, where they might in that case be drowned.

They were entitled to a chance for their lives as well as himself, however bad they might be, and to deprive them of that opportunity would be little short of murder.

So he left the trap open and groped around to see whether there was any opening by which, in case of emergency, he could get out and swim for his life.

At that moment he heard the two rascals scrambling up the ladder as fast as they could.

The rapid flooding of the room below had driven them to seek safety aloft.

No sooner were they in the loft than they slammed the trap down and stood upon it.

Then they heard Fred moving about.

"Are you up here, kid?" asked Rowley.

"I am," replied Fred, coldly, for he saw he would have stood small chance for his life had he been the last to ascend.

"Then open the trap in the roof, so we kin all git out."

"Where is the trap?" asked the young operator, delighted to learn that there was an opening in the peaked roof.

"In the center, to one side."

Fred, following this hint, soon found the trap, which was held by a small bolt.

He released the bolt and threw open the flap, which worked outward on hinges.

Then he worked himself through the opening and straddled the middle of the roof.

Rowley and Jobkins did not immediately follow, but contented themselves with thrusting their heads and shoulders through the opening.

The rain had died away to a mere drizzle, but the wind was blowing a stiff breeze that raised whitecaps on the turbulent surface of Snake River.

It was dark as pitch, and it was impossible to find out whether they were sailing along in the middle of the stream or close to the shore.

In any event, their position was one of great peril, but they were powerless to make it any better.

The house was now about half submerged and rolled from side to side like an old-fashioned Dutch lugger in a cross sea.

Occasionally when it made an extra low dip to one side or the other Fred for the moment thought it was going to turn over.

This, however, it couldn't do, owing to the quantity of water ballast it carried in the room below.

There was a little comfort in the reflection that owing to its buoyant character it could scarcely sink much below the level of the floor of the loft.

Apparently the three were in for an all-night ride if their odd craft did not go ashore or fetch up against some obstruction in their path.

As the minutes passed away Fred saw the \$100 bill he had fondly hoped to capture slipping from his grasp.

It was too bad, after all the trouble and danger of crossing the river, to lose the prize that surely would have been his if he had not stopped at that house.

Had he kept right on after landing he would by that time have been well on his way to Greenville, if not actually there.

The more he thought the matter over the more exasperating it appeared to him.

"Say, kid, how do you like it up there?" asked Rowley, who seemed to consider their chances of ultimate escape pretty good.

"Why don't you come up and see how you like it yourself?" asked Fred.

"This here place where we are is better," returned the rascal. "I reckon yer won't reach Greenville to-night to send that message yer were in sich a sweat about," he added, with a chuckle.

"That needn't worry you," retorted Fred, in a sour tone.

"It ain't worryin' me a bit. Mebbe yer kin send it from Glendale if we hit the shore. That'll save yer that long tramp of six miles through the mud yer were goin' to take

only we stopped yer. Yer ought to thank us for providin' yer with a free ride down the river."

Fred made no reply, for at that moment he caught sight of several lights in the distance which pointed out the line of the shore on the Glendale side.

He was now able to see that they were some distance out on the stream, which reduced their chances of grounding near the bank very soon.

The speed with which they drew near to the lights showed how swiftly the current was bearing them down the river.

As they reached a point opposite the light a turn in the stream swung the house in toward the shore.

The house was caught by another current that set into a bite of the bank where hundreds of the logs from above had jammed together into a kind of temporary boom that extended out a short distance, and was held in place by the diverse influences of the tide at this point.

Before the three voyagers suspected that an obstruction lay in their path, the house came with a jolt against the outer line of logs, and Fred, only by the greatest good luck in the world, saved himself from taking a header into the wobbling mass.

Rowley and Jobkins were unprepared for the shock, too, and they fell over themselves on the floor of the loft.

"Gee! I wonder what we've run against?" Fred asked himself, being unable to distinguish the nature of the obstructions in the darkness.

The house gradually swung around till its side rubbed against the logs, and as the action of the current bobbed the roof towards them Fred made out several of the logs lying stationary, and he began to understand that they had something to do with the stoppage of the building.

It was bad enough to be floating down the stream, but it was worse to be held up by a collection of partly submerged logs.

"Hello, kid, what have we run ag'in?" asked Rowley, who couldn't see the obstructions as the trap opening was on the side opposite the logs.

"Climb up here and see for yourself," was what Fred said.

Neither of the rascals cared to roost on the roof, so they didn't climb up.

The house was not fated to remain long in the embrace of the logs.

By degrees the action of the current worked it in toward shore and it finally grounded close to a big overhanging tree.

As the leaves brushed in Fred's face he grabbed hold of one of the boughs and succeeded in swinging himself on to the bank.

The two rascals called after him as soon as they saw him vanish from the peaked roof, but he did not consider it necessary to make them any reply.

As soon as he felt the firm ground under him once more he started off briskly toward the nearest light.

It proved to be the dwelling of the foreman of a section gang on the railroad that ran to Glendale.

Fred knocked on the door and was admitted.

Here, before a fire which warmed his half frozen frame, he told the story of his trip across the river, and his adventures in connection with the building which had carried him down the river to that point.

He learned to his great satisfaction that Glendale was only about three miles away.

He told the railroad foreman the nature of the errand that had brought him across the river and how anxious he was to reach the nearest telegraph office as soon as possible.

"It is ten o'clock now," said the foreman, "and as the road is in a beastly state it would probably take you hours to walk to town in the dark. Better stay here. I'll give you a bed and will send you on to the yard on a hand-car around seven in the morning. That will give you plenty of time to send your message to Boston before ten o'clock."

Fred, with some reluctance, accepted the friendly invitation to stay at the man's home that night.

He was not sorry he had done so when, half an hour later just as he was under the blankets, he heard the rain come down in bucketsful once more.

He wondered if Rowley and Jobkins had succeeded in getting ashore from the house, and, if they had, where they were at that moment.

Toward morning the weather cleared up, and the stars were paling in the sky when the section foreman came into the room and awoke him.

He hurried on his clothes and when he got downstairs found breakfast on the table ready and waiting for his host and himself.

It was just sunrise when Fred and the foreman left the house for the railroad track, nearly half a mile away.

About a quarter to seven a hand-car loaded with section hands came bowling down the line.

It stopped at the crossing where Fred and the foreman were standing.

After the men had alighted the foreman instructed two of the hands to carry the boy to the yard, so Fred said good-bye to the friendly railroader, mounted the hand-car, and was soon being hurried toward the freight yard at Glendale.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH FRED SAVES MAJOR STRATTON FROM BEING ROBBED.

As soon as Fred was landed at Glendale he hurried to the nearest Western Union office and presented Mr. Woodhull's message for transmission.

He introduced himself to the operator as a brother telegrapher in charge of the company's office at Edgecomb village, and explained how he had rowed across the river early on the previous evening in order to carry the message, which was a very important one, to Greenville to be dispatched from that place.

He then went on to tell how he had stopped at the shanty on the edge of the river for temporary shelter; how he had been treated by the two rascals he met there, and how the building had been washed away by the sudden rising of the water, and the three of them had been carried down the stream to a point three miles north of Glendale, where he succeeded in getting ashore.

As soon as he completed his story, which did not take him long to narrate, the operator forwarded the message to Boston and added the words, "Important—for immediate delivery," for the instruction of the general office.

Fred signed the despatch as paid at Edgecomb, and re-

ceived a signed statement from the operator giving the hour and minute when the message had been forwarded to Boston.

With that document in his pocket Fred bade the operator good-bye and started to return to Edgecomb.

The nearest route back was by the river road, which offered pretty rocky walking that morning; but Fred was in high spirits, for the \$100 was as good as in his pocket.

However, the sun was shining bright and warm, and though the fifteen-mile walk to a point opposite the village might take him a good part of the day, he faced the job like a little man.

He entertained some slight hope of recovering his boat which he had tied securely to a tree when he landed near the house, but if it was gone when he reached the spot he expected to get a boatman higher up to put him across.

If the boat he had borrowed was lost for good he would have to pay for it, but on the whole he felt that he could afford to do that under the circumstances.

With his waterproof coat under his arm he trudged sturdily forward, unmindful of the mud, and taking care to skirt the big puddles which glistened at frequent intervals along his way.

After covering nearly three miles, which brought him close to the vicinity where the house had grounded the night before, he climbed upon the roadside fence to take a rest.

In front of him, a short distance off, he could see the rushing river swelled to a considerable degree, and dotted here and there with floating logs.

Behind him was a thick hedge, with fields beyond.

Ahead of him the road branched slightly away from the stream.

Fred was thinking how surprised and pleased his mother would be when he handed her that \$100 which she needed so much, when he heard a cry for help in a man's voice from somewhere behind the hedge.

The cry was repeated, and mingled with it came the rough tones of two men.

Wondering who was in trouble, and why, Fred sprang into the field, rushed to the hedge, and parting the bushes looked through.

In an opening on the other side two men were struggling with a third.

The man who was getting the worst of the encounter was well dressed and seemingly a gentleman.

His assailants the boy had no difficulty in recognizing as Rowley and Jobkins.

There could be but one object in their attack and that was robbery.

Even as Fred looked they succeeded in tripping the gentleman up, and he fell heavily on the soft turf.

He lay still, however, after hitting the ground, for his head had struck upon a stone, and the shock had stunned him.

The rascals then proceeded to rifle his pockets without delay.

Fred saw them draw a bag of money from one pocket and a large wallet from another.

"I can't stand by and see that gentleman cleaned out without making an effort to assist him," breathed the boy. "And yet, what can I do against those two villains, one

of whom I know has a knife, or at least he had it last night in the house?"

Fred, however, was too plucky to hold back simply because the odds were against him when he believed that it was his duty to do something.

He glanced around for something that might answer for a weapon.

At his feet he saw a heavy stick.

He grabbed it up at once, and thus armed prepared for instant action.

"Hold on there, you rascals!" shouted Fred, springing from the bushes, club in hand. "What in thunder are you doing? Robbing the man?"

The two ruffians paused in their work and glanced at him in a startled way.

"It's the kid!" snarled Jobkins, who was on his knees beside the fallen man, and was in the act of taking a paper from one of his inner pockets.

Rowley, who had straightened up from a stooping position, glanced over his shoulder with an ugly scowl on his by no means prepossessing countenance.

"Come now, drop that!" said Fred, advancing on the rascals.

Rowley turned around and faced him.

"Buttin' in, are yer?" he roared. "I reckon we'll learn yer a lesson yer won't like!"

He made a dash to seize Fred, but the boy swung his club too quick for him, landing a blow on his shoulder that staggered him.

Rowley uttered a string of imprecations and put his hand to his hip pocket.

Suspecting the fellow was about to draw a revolver, Fred jumped at him and brought his stick down on Rowley's head with such good effect as to stretch him senseless on the ground.

Then he turned his attention to Jobkins.

That ruffian was paralyzed by the way the boy had handled his companion.

He pulled out his knife and jumped to his feet.

Fred gave him no time to use the weapon, but swung his club upward, catching the fellow a blow on his wrist that sent the knife hurtling through the air into the bushes.

Jobkins, furious with rage, tried to close on him.

The young operator, nimble as a monkey on his feet, avoided his onrush by springing aside.

Then, with a low sweeping swing of his club, smashed the rascal in the shins.

Jobkins fell to the ground with a howl of pain, and was unable to get up in a hurry.

Fred stood over him with his weapon and ordered him not to move on his peril.

The victim of the villains had by this time recovered his senses and was a witness of Jobkins' discomfiture.

"Well done, my lad!" he said, picking himself up. "You came just in time to save me from being robbed. You scoundrel!" he added, facing the rascal. "You and your companion shall pay dearly for your assault on me. You both have the look of jail-birds, and I'll see that you go back to prison, where you belong."

Jobkins glared up at him, but said nothing.

"Here, my lad," said the gentleman, "take my handkerchief and tie that rascal's hands behind his back. Give

me your club, which I noticed you know how to use with good effect, and I'll see that he doesn't make any trouble for you."

The gentleman was clearly a man of resolution and action.

Had he not been taken at sudden disadvantage by the ruffians he would have made matters very hot for them before they could have succeeded in getting the better of him, if indeed they could have done so at all.

His manner helped to cow Jobkins, and Fred had no trouble in tying the fellow's hands behind him.

Then insensible Rowley was treated in the same way with the aid of his own bandana handkerchief.

When both jobs had been satisfactorily executed by the young operator the gentleman expressed his satisfaction.

"Now, my lad, what is your name and where do you live? I wish to know whom I am under such a great obligation to."

"My name is Fred Sparks, sir. I live on a small farm belonging to my mother about two miles outside of the village of Edgcomb, on the other side of the river."

"Ah, indeed," replied the gentleman. "You are some distance from your home. Let me introduce myself. I am Major Payne Stratton, and I live in Glendale."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Major Stratton," said Fred, with some deference, for the major looked like a man of position and influence.

"You are a plucky boy, Sparks," said Major Stratton. "I don't know how you managed, all by yourself, to down both of these rascals, but there is no disputing the evidence of the fact. However, I recovered my senses in time to see the neat way you handled that ruffian yonder, and I am bound to say that no one could have done it better. The rascals collared me unawares and pulled me off my horse while I was looking at some of the damage done by the recent rains. It is my habit to take a ride around the country every pleasant morning. This morning I followed my usual custom in spite of the miserable condition of the roads. On this occasion I was combining business with pleasure, for I brought out a sum of money to loan a farmer acquaintance of mine, and but for your timely assistance I would have been robbed of it."

The major stooped and recovered his bag of money and pocketbook.

"Now, my boy," continued the gentleman, "it is only fair that I should testify my appreciation of your services by giving you some substantial recompense."

The major opened his wallet, which was well filled with bills.

"I'd rather not take any pay, sir," replied Fred. "You are welcome to what I did in your behalf. I considered it my duty to interfere to save you from being robbed and possibly injured by a pair of rascals whom I knew to be hard characters."

"But you must let me do something for you, my lad," insisted the major. "There are many ways I could probably be of assistance to you. Do you work on your mother's farm?"

"No, sir; not since the first of last month, when I took charge of the Edgcomb office of the Western Union Telegraph Co."

"Are you a telegraph operator?"

"Yes, sir, though I'm only a new hand at the business."

"What pay do you get?"

Fred told him.

"What prospects have you of advancement?"

The boy said that he wasn't very clear on that point, but that he supposed after he had been a year or so in the company's employ he would get a better position with more pay.

"At any rate, that's what I'm looking for," concluded Fred.

"How would you like to get a better position and more pay right away?"

"That would suit me very well, sir," replied the boy, eagerly; "but I can hardly expect such good luck."

"You look smart, and I should judge that you're ambitious."

"Well, sir, I'd like to get ahead in the world as fast as I could, but I expect to do it through my own efforts entirely. I haven't any backer, and on the whole I don't know that I'd care to be boosted into such a thing as a soft snap. It doesn't do a fellow any real good in the long run."

The major nodded as if he appreciated the force of the boy's words.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it's a good thing to have a friend at court, as the saying is. A boy may have the ability to make his mark and yet lack the opportunity to show what's in him. It's half the battle sometimes to get an early opening in the right direction. I think your talents fit for a wider field than that offered a regular telegraph operator. How would you like to go into railroading?"

"Railroading, sir?"

"Yes. I can place you in the Eastern road, for I am one of the directors, and well acquainted with the chief officials of the line. There are three branches to the service—office, mechanical and road. Perhaps it would be well for you to get your start in the first. You would have to make up your mind to go to Boston, though, for the general offices of the company are there."

"I have no objection to go to Boston in order to benefit myself," replied Fred.

"And your mother?"

"My brother John has charge of the farm and my presence is not necessary as long as I can send a few dollars home every month."

"Very good. Do I understand that you will give up the Western Union, then?"

"I will to get something that offers a better future."

"Very well. I suppose you know that a good deal goes by favor in this world?"

"Yes, sir; I have heard so."

"I mention this because I have it in my power to favor you—and I intend to do it. You have done me a great service to-day, and I should not be satisfied unless I returned it in a way that would tend most to your ultimate advantage. In a few days I have to go to Boston. I will then see the general passenger agent of the road about placing you. In due time you will receive a letter to report on a certain day in Boston. You will do so promptly, and after that I shall expect to hear a good report of you, for, remember, I shall take an interest in your progress, and to that end will keep you in mind. Now, Sparks, we must see about getting these rascals to the Glendale jail. You

don't mind keeping an eye on them, I suppose, until I can ride to town and send the police out here to take charge of them?"

"I'll watch them, sir, and see that they don't get away," replied Fred.

"Good-bye, then, till I see you again. Here is my card with my address. If you come to Glendale do not fail to visit me. I'm generally at home in the afternoon unless I'm out of town."

"Good-bye, sir. I'm much obliged for your offer to get me a better position than the one I now hold."

"Don't mention it. The obligation is all on my side."

With those words Major Stratton mounted his horse and galloped off toward town, leaving Fred standing guard over the two ruffians.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH FRED LEAVES HIS HOME FOR BOSTON.

After the lapse of an hour, during which Rowley recovered his senses, and the two rascals made all sorts of threats against Fred for doing them up, three policemen arrived in a light wagon and took charge of the prisoners.

They were dumped into the wagon with little ceremony, and when the outfit had departed in the direction of Glendale, Fred started on again up the river road.

After a short walk he reached the indentation of the shore where the house had come to rest after its trip of ten miles down the stream.

He saw it aground to one side not far from the tree that had furnished him his means of escape.

Further out he saw hundreds of logs jammed together and piled on one another against the shore.

The submerged house and the mass of logs gave one some idea of the damage which the flood had occasioned along the course of the Snake River.

After Fred had satisfied his curiosity he resumed his way again.

By noon he was nine miles from Glendale.

The sight of a small farmhouse in the near distance with the smoke pouring from the kitchen chimney reminded Fred that he was getting hungry once more, so he decided that, as he still had some distance to go, he would try to get a meal at the place.

He was now able to pay for the favor, as he had recovered his four dollars from the rascal Rowley.

Accordingly, he walked up the lane to the farmhouse and asked if he could be accommodated with a meal.

The farmer willingly acceded to Fred's request, but refused to accept any pay for same.

The boy told the story of his night's and morning's adventures at the dinner table, and was looked on as quite a hero.

The farmer declared that he must have a cast-iron nerve to have dared the dangers of the river in the darkness and rain.

"Five hundred dollars wouldn't have induced me to attempt it," he said. "I consider that you took your life in your hands, and that you ought to be thankful to Providence that you got across alive."

Fred remained nearly an hour at the farmhouse and then resumed his journey.

He had gone about four miles when he came to the place where he landed in the boat the night before, and to his great satisfaction he saw the stout little craft tied to the tree just as he had left it.

The stream having overflowed the spot, Fred had to remove his shoes and stockings, roll up his trousers legs, and wade out a dozen feet or more before he could reach the boat.

"I guess I've got my work cut out for me to row up against the stream," the boy said to himself, as he looked out on the swiftly-flowing river; "but it will have to be done, so the sooner I get down to work the better."

He decided to row across first.

He was carried down half a mile before he landed on the other side.

After taking a rest he started to row up the river, keeping close in to the shore, where he found the current less swift.

He was obliged to stop several times to renew his wind, but about four o'clock the spire of the principal church in Edgecomb loomed up ahead, and he judged that he had not over a mile more to go.

At length he reached the little wharf where he had hired the boat.

The boatman was sitting at the door of his house smoking when Fred landed and fastened the boat.

"I had almost given you and the boat up as lost," he said, when Fred stepped up. "I didn't notice you coming across. Which way did you come?"

Fred told him that he had crossed two miles below and then rowed up on that side.

"Were you carried down as far as that last night?"

"I was. And then I was carried nearly ten miles further down afterward on a shanty."

"How is that?" asked the boatman, in some surprise.

Without going into particulars about the two rascals, Fred told him how he had stopped at the building to rest, and that while he was there a sudden rise in the river had carried the house away, and that it finally went ashore three miles that side of Glendale.

"Where was the boat all that time?"

"Tied to a tree where I landed first."

"Did you have to walk all the way back to it?"

"Looks as if I did, for there's your boat safe and sound at your wharf."

"I didn't know but you might have got a lift on the way. It must have been tough walking in the condition the roads are now."

"You can gamble on it that it wasn't a picnic."

"Did you send your telegram off all right?"

"Sure thing. I sent it from Glendale."

"Then you had to walk to Glendale from the place where the house went ashore?"

"No. I put up all night at the home of a section foreman on the Eastern Railroad, and this morning he had me carried to town on a hand-car."

"Then you walked all the way from Glendale to the place where you tied the boat, eh?"

"I did."

"I don't wonder, then, that the trip took you nearly all day."

When Fred left the boatman's he went straight to the

hotel and presented the paper he had received from the Western Union operator at Glendale certifying to the fact that the despatch had been sent to Boston at a quarter of eight that morning.

Mr. Murray read it, accepted it as satisfactory evidence that Fred had fulfilled his contract, and handed him the envelope containing the \$100.

Fred then went to the office and returned the waterproof, the lantern and the old hat, after which he locked up, went to the stable, got his horse and rode home.

"Why, Fred!" exclaimed his mother, as soon as he appeared, "where were you last night that you did not come home?"

"On the other side of the river, mother," he answered, cheerfully.

"On the other side of the river!" she cried. "What took you there?"

"A rowboat, mother," he replied, laughingly. "Also the chance of winning \$100 by getting a despatch through to Boston in time after the wires went down."

"I don't understand you, Fred."

"Well, let me have my supper first, for I'm as hungry as a hunter, and then I'll tell you the whole story."

His brother John now came in and started to wash up.

"Why didn't you come home last night, Fred?" he asked. "Mother was very anxious about you. I rode in to the village this morning and found your office locked up. Where were you?"

Fred gave him the same answer he had given his mother.

"I s'pose you went across before the bridge gave way and couldn't get back before to-day," said John.

"No. It was because the bridge went down carrying the wires with it that I went across."

"Is that so?" said his brother, in some astonishment.

"How did you get across?"

"Rowed across in a boat."

"Not by yourself?" said John, incredulously.

"Yes, by myself."

"When did you do it?"

"Last night between five and six."

John looked at his brother as if he thought he had done the craziest kind of an act.

"Did you tell mother what you did?" he asked.

"I told her I had been across the river, that's all."

"What did you go across for? Don't you know that you were risking your life?"

"I went across to earn \$100, and I earned it," replied Fred.

"A hundred dollars!"

"That's what I said. Here is the money to prove it," and Fred took the envelope out of his pocket and showed his brother five \$20 bills.

John looked at the money with a stare that showed his general unfamiliarity with \$20 bills.

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Sparks at that moment.

"Is that money yours?" asked John, as if such a fact was truly astonishing.

"It's mine," replied Fred, in a tone of satisfaction.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Give it to mother. She needs a hundred dollars badly just now."

Thus speaking, the young operator took his place at the table.

The meal was eaten in comparative silence.

"Now, mother, I'm going to tell my story," said Fred, at length.

He began with the appearance of Mr. Woodhull in his office the preceding afternoon, and his offer of \$100 if he (Fred) could by any means get a message through to Boston for him before ten o'clock on the following morning.

"I took him up, mother, because I knew you needed \$100 the worst way," went on Fred. "I had only to manage to get across the river before morning and the money would be mine, so I decided to risk it, though it was a pretty hard and perilous feat."

Then he went on with his story, telling how he had managed after considerable difficulty to hire a boat; how he had set out on the turbulent river, and how he had finally arrived at the other shore two miles below.

He told how he had applied for shelter at the house on the bank; the reception he met with there; how the rising water had carried the house away, described the trip down the river, and how he had finally reached shore.

He narrated how he had spent the night at the section foreman's house, and had gone on to Glendale next morning, from which place he sent the message within the stipulated time.

Then followed his trip back up the river, in the course of which he described how he had saved Major Stratton from the two rascals, and how in return for that service the major had promised to get him started in the railroad business in Boston.

"Surely you don't mean to leave your position in Edgecomb and go way up to Boston?" cried his mother, who did not relish even the mere suggestion of such a thing.

"Why not, if I can better myself?" replied Fred.

"Oh, I couldn't let you go so far away as that among strangers, my son," she said, with an anxious ring in her voice.

"Yes, you could, mother. You wouldn't stand in my way for anything. Edgecomb is really no place for me, no more than the farm was. I mean to get ahead in the world, and the only way to do that is to get out and hustle where one can make the most of his opportunities. I believe I've made a good friend in Major Stratton. He's promised to give me a start in the right direction. Then it will be up to me to make good, and don't you worry but I'll do that. Now, mother, you've been worrying yourself about the lack of \$100 to make your next payment on the mortgage. Well, here is the money," and he tossed the five bills into her hands.

The little woman looked at the bills and then, with tears in her eyes, she rose and threw her arms around Fred's neck.

"To think that you risked your life to earn that money for me!" she cried in quavering tones. "Had I known you were going to do such a thing I never would have allowed you to do it."

"Well, you didn't know, mother, and so the money has been honestly earned and it will pull you out of a hole. Let it go at that and say no more about it."

Next day a force of men were put to work rebuilding the ruined section of the bridge, and at the same time a number

of Western Union linemen managed to reconnect the broken wires and thus re-establish the circuit in a temporary fashion.

At any rate, Fred's instrument began to show signs of life again, and he sent a number of delayed messages that he had on file.

Thus a matter of ten days passed away, and he was beginning to wonder whether the major hadn't forgotten all about him when he received a letter bearing the imprint of the office of the General Superintendent of the Eastern Railroad.

Opening it, Fred found an exceedingly brief communication addressed to himself requesting him to report at the superintendent's office in Boston at his earliest convenience.

The result of that letter was that Fred resigned his job with the Western Union company, and one day about a week after its receipt he left Edgecomb en route for the "Hub."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH FRED TAKES UP RAILROADING.

"I wish to see Mr. Lamport."

It was Fred Sparks who spoke, and the person he addressed was a young clerk in the employ of the Eastern Railroad, in their general offices in the city of Boston.

"Got an appointment?" asked the clerk, with a certain haughty air bred of constant contact with visitors whose business might or might not be of sufficient importance to warrant their names being carried into the sanctum of the great mogul whose private office was close by.

"Not exactly," replied Fred; "but I've got a letter which directs me to report here as soon as I could."

"Did you bring that letter with you?"

"I did."

"Let me have it and I will take it in to Mr. Lamport."

Fred produced the letter, the clerk took it, told him to take a seat and then disappeared through a door which bore the two words: "General Superintendent."

In a few minutes he reappeared and beckoned Fred to follow him.

A moment later the boy found himself standing beside the superintendent's desk.

Mr. Lamport was one of the most important employees in the service of the Eastern Railroad Co., and his manner showed it.

"Sit down," he said to Fred, scarcely glancing at the boy.

"Your name is Sparks?"

"Yes, sir."

"You belong in Edgecomb?"

"On a farm two miles outside the village."

"Parents living?"

"My mother is."

"You have been recommended to me for office work—as a starter, till we find out what you're best fitted for—by the general passenger agent, Mr. Peabody. You are a telegraph operator, I understand?"

"Yes, sir. I had charge of the Western Union office at Edgecomb."

"Didn't like the business, I suppose. Want to change. I have been requested to put you to work. When can you begin?"

"At once."

The superintendent drew a card from a drawer, filled in some blanks on it with Fred's name and other particulars, and placed it in a shallow oblong basket on his desk.

Then he pressed an electric button.

A small, neatly-dressed boy answered the summons.

Mr. Lamport in the meantime had dashed a few brief sentences off on a desk-pad.

Tearing the sheet off he enclosed it in an envelope which he addressed, "Andrew Bulgin, Esq.," and handed it to the small youth, with these words:

"Take this young man to the Claim Department."

Then he turned to the desk and other business, while the small boy led Fred out into the corridor.

The general offices of the Eastern Railroad Company occupied the upper floors of the depot building, while the headquarters of the president and other officers were located in the heart of the city.

The boy led Fred down the corridor to the extreme end, where a door faced them bearing the words, "Claim Department."

Opening this door, Fred's conductor ushered him into a small reception-room, the first of the suite, where they found another small boy seated before a small table reading a magazine.

The superintendent's messenger laid the envelope on the table and walked away.

The youth at the table took up the envelope, looked at Fred and then entered an adjoining room with it.

In a moment or two he returned and told Fred to go in.

Our hero did so and found himself in a large, well-furnished room and in the presence of the chief of the department, who was seated at a desk in the center of it.

Mr. Bulgin, who was a small, nervous-looking man, with eyeglasses, looked Fred over critically and then said:

"Write a good hand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fred.

"Come with me."

He rose from his chair and led the way into an adjoining room fitted up with two desks, at the larger one of which was seated a sandy-haired, sharp-featured man of perhaps forty.

"Mr. Hallock," said Mr. Bulgin, "you are short handed, I believe. Put this young man at work copying reports in our claim book. I dare say you will find him useful in any other way that you wish to employ him."

Mr. Hallock, assistant claim agent, nodded and then gave Fred a sharp glance as the chief returned to his own office.

"Name?" asked Hallock.

"Fred Sparks."

"Handwriting good?"

"Yes, sir."

"Specimen, please. You will find paper on yonder desk."

Fred sat down at the desk and wrote a dozen sentences off-hand, finishing off with his name and address.

He brought it over to Mr. Hallock.

The assistant agent glanced at the paper and seemed to be satisfied.

He pushed a button in his desk.

A nearby door opened and a clerk with a pen behind his ear entered the room.

"The copying of our claim reports are away behind. I think?" said Mr. Hallock.

"Very much so, sir. We are short handed, as you know."

"I know. Take this young man. His name is Sparks. Give him the desk formerly used by Maltby, and show him what to do with the reports."

"Very well, sir. Come this way," to Fred.

The boy followed the young man into the next room, where a dozen clerks were busily employed over books and papers at as many desks.

He was shown to a desk in a corner by a window overlooking an alleyway.

There was a closet nearby where he was directed to hang his hat and overcoat.

The clerk then got a record book—a big, thick volume it was, and a pile of legal documents.

Fred was told to copy the contents of the papers into the book, in their order.

"Bear in mind, Sparks," said the clerk, "that the copies must be an exact fac similitude of the originals. No words or punctuation marks omitted or transposed. No word or mark inserted that does not appear in the legal copy. In a word, you cannot be too careful in transcribing these papers, as everything depends on their correctness. Understand?"

Fred said that he understood what was required of him and he was left to make a beginning.

The other clerks in the room looked at him curiously, mentally sizing their new associate up and wondering what sort of a chap he was.

This first inspection was on the whole favorable to Fred.

They liked his face and the way he carried himself.

They judged him to be a good fellow and were disposed to court his acquaintance.

Fred worked steadily away until noon, when the clerks began to drop work and go out for lunch.

There was an exit and entrance for the employees of this room on a side corridor leading to a stairway that connected with the alley.

As each clerk passed a certain desk he picked up a small square slip of paper, stamped it on a time clock, wrote his name on it, and hung it on a file.

He repeated this performance when he came back within the hour allotted to him.

The clerk who had introduced Fred into the room and set him at work came up and, telling him he could go to lunch, explained the time-clock system.

Accordingly, when Fred put his hat and coat on he followed the routine and left his name on file.

He had noticed a clean, modest-appearing restaurant within a block of the depot when on his way that morning to the superintendent's office, so he went there for his noon-day meal.

He dispatched his lunch inside of half an hour and left the restaurant with a toothpick between his teeth.

With thirty minutes yet at his disposal, he walked slowly back toward the depot.

The sidewalks were alive with pedestrians of both sexes, half of them probably on their way to some train.

There were also many vehicles passing in the street.

When Fred reached the street on which the depot faced he saw an elegant equipage drawn by a pair of mettlesome gray, standing in front of the main entrance to the offices.

A handsomely-dressed girl of sixteen or seventeen years

was seated in the back seat holding a red parasol to ward off the sunlight.

The coachman, who had been sitting as stiff as a ramrod on the elevated box seat, suddenly noticed that something had gotten out of gear with the harness and descended from his perch to fix it.

At that moment a red auto came gliding down the street.

When it reached a point opposite the team the chauffeur let off a most unearthly "toot, toot" from his horn to clear the way ahead.

The high-stepping grays took alarm at the sound, and both suddenly sprang forward, knocking the coachman to one side in the dirt.

In another moment the horses and carriage were off down the street at a speed that scattered the people at the first crossing right and left in terror for their lives.

Fred was standing at the opposite corner when the team took fright.

He heard the shouts and saw the people fall back in some confusion.

Then he saw what was happening.

It was a runaway pure and simple, and as the block below was congested with trucks and other vehicles waiting for their chance to get alongside the long freight platform, a smashup, that was bound to wreck the stately equipage and probably kill the horses as well as the girl in the carriage, was imminent.

He saw that unless the team could be stopped within a comparatively short distance a catastrophe was certain.

The girl evidently realized her peril, too, for she dropped her parasol, stood up and seemed on the point of jumping out, which would probably have been a fatal move on her part.

Fred never thought quicker in his life.

On the spur of the moment, with the nerve for which he was noted at home, he decided that it was up to him to stop the runaway and save the girl.

He sprang into the middle of the street and waved his hat and arms at the approaching team.

The frantic horses paid no more attention to him than if he wasn't there.

They bore right down on him like a whirlwind, and were upon him before he realized his own danger.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH FRED MAKES A DARING RESCUE.

After all, self-preservation is the first law of nature.

Fred jumped back to save himself from being run down.

As the nearest horse brushed by him one of his hands caught the check-rein while the other instinctively seized the upper part of the girth.

In a fraction of a second the plucky boy was carried off his feet.

Shouts and cries from the sidewalk greeted his perilous predicament.

Everybody looked to see him fall under the legs of the frightened animals, to be crushed under the wheels of the carriage.

But Fred's lucky star saved him from such a fate, and his steel-like sinews bred of years of farmwork, aided by his natural agility, did the rest.

Springing into the air he threw one leg across the horse's back and swung himself astride of the animal.

Tearing off his jacket, he threw it over the steed's eyes and pulled his head back.

The animal immediately lost headway and began to hold back, thereby clogging the movements of his mate.

The girl in the carriage gazed in a fascinated way at the boy who had come to her rescue.

Instinctively she felt that her safety lay in him.

As the team lost headway several men took courage to jump into the street and add their efforts to that of the brave boy.

Finally the horses were stopped within a short distance of a heavily-loaded truck, and Fred sprang from his perch and resumed his jacket.

He was surrounded by an excited crowd of onlookers who vied with one another to express the admiration they felt for his intrepid performance.

He pushed his way back to the carriage and asked the girl if she wished to get out of the carriage.

"Yes, yes," she said, nervously; "please assist me."

She put her foot on the iron step and then sprang into his arms.

He led her over to the sidewalk with some difficulty, as the crowd by this time had grown into mob-like proportions.

"Shall I escort you back to the depot, miss?" he asked her, politely.

"If you will be so kind," she replied tremulously, grasping his arm for support, for now that the peril had passed away the reaction made her weak and almost hysterical. "How brave you were to spring on the horse's back and stop the team! I am sure you saved my life."

"I am glad I was able to be of service to you, miss," replied Fred, regarding the girl with a look of admiration, for she was uncommonly pretty. "You look faint. Shall I take you into the drug-store to rest?"

"No, no; it isn't necessary. Take me back to the depot, where my father is."

"Certainly."

He took her by the arm and they made their way through the crowd to the street crossing, and so over to the block bordered by the depot.

A fine-looking gentleman came running up to them just as they reached the corner of the building.

"Father!" cried the girl, throwing herself into his arms and bursting into tears.

"My dear child!" he exclaimed, kissing her fondly. "Tell me that you're not hurt in any way. I saw what happened."

"No, father, I'm all right, but I'm—I'm frightened!"

"Well, miss, I'll bid you good-bye now," said Fred, feeling that his usefulness to her had come to an end.

"No, don't go," she said, recovering her self-possession a bit and catching him by the sleeve. "Father, this boy saved my life."

"Indeed! Then, young man, you have placed me under a debt of gratitude. Let me know your name and your address, for I shall want to see you again."

"Fred Sparks is my name, sir. My address is the Claim Department of the Eastern Railroad Co."

"The Eastern Railroad! Are you one of the clerks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Young man, you shall hear from me in a day or two at the outside. I am George Wentworth, the president of the road, and this is my daughter, Edith. Be assured that I shall not forget the service you have rendered my child. You have thanked him, have you not, Edith?" he added to the girl.

"No, father, I was too confused and frightened. You will excuse me, won't you, Mr. Sparks?" she said, looking at Fred. "I am deeply grateful to you for saving my life, and shall never forget what I owe you."

"That's all right, Miss Wentworth. I am glad I was able to help you out."

"But you risked your life to save me. You might have been crushed by the horses and the carriage. You were very, very brave to do what you did. I saw it all. You were the only one who dared come to my aid."

She flashed a look of admiration at him that made his blood tingle.

"Well, I must get back to work, for I have already overstepped my time," said Fred.

"You will call at our house and see me, will you not?" she said, detaining him. "We live at No. — Commonwealth Avenue. Write it down for him, father."

"We shall be very happy to see you, young man," said Mr. Wentworth, writing his address on the back of a card and handing it to Fred. "Mrs. Wentworth will want to thank you, too. Call on us as soon as you can."

"I will try to do so," replied the young clerk.

He lifted his hat and walked away, followed by Edith's eyes.

His stamped ticket showed that he had been out an hour and a half.

"I was unable to return any sooner," he said to the clerk who looked after the tickets. "There was a runaway in the street and I stopped the team, that's why——"

"You stopped the team!" exclaimed the clerk.

"I did."

The clerk whistled and looked at him in a strange way.

"Was Miss Wentworth hurt?" he said, in some little excitement.

"Not a bit. You know then that——"

"It was the carriage of the president of the road—yes. I'm thinking you made a ten-strike. You're likely to be in the butter-tub after this."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Fred, puzzled at his remark.

"If you prevented a smash-up, which might have resulted in the death of Miss Wentworth, you'll be in line for the softest job in the building. I wish I was in your shoes, Sparks!"

"I'm not looking for a soft job, and wouldn't take it if it was offered to me," replied Fred, promptly.

"You—wouldn't—take a soft—job?" fairly gasped the astonished clerk. "Oh, come now, you're joking!"

"No, I'm not joking," answered Fred, walking over to his desk and resuming his work of copying the legal papers into the record book.

Within a quarter of an hour every clerk in the room had learned what the new clerk had done while out at lunch, and he was the focus of admiring and envious glances from the rest of the force.

At five o'clock work was over for the day.

"I hear you saved the life of the daughter of the president of this road," said the head clerk of the room, the young man who had put him to work, and whose name was Fuller.

"I won't deny it," replied Fred, modestly. "I did what I thought was right."

"Well, all I can say is that you've done a mighty big thing for yourself."

"In what way?"

"In what way? Why, by doing a favor for Miss Edith Wentworth you've made a good friend for yourself in her father. He won't forget you. I'll bet you won't remain long in this room doing routine work. You'll be advanced to some easy berth with big pay and short hours."

"Think so?" said Fred, with a smile.

"I'm sure of it."

"I wouldn't advise you to bet on it. I didn't seek a position on this road to be advanced before I deserved it. I expect to get ahead on my merits, not by luck."

Fuller regarded his words with some astonishment.

"Oh, come, now, Sparks, you don't mean anything like that. Promotion here goes as much by favor as by anything else. You may be as smart as greased lightning, but it does not necessarily follow that you'll get on unless the powers that be take special notice of you. In no business is competition for advancement so keen as it is among the clerks of a big railroad company. Accident and pull count for as much, and, very often, more than real merit. Who got you the job here?"

"Major Payne Stratton."

"The deuce you say! He's one of the directors. Are you a friend of his?"

"I am acquainted with him," replied Fred, evasively.

"With him and the president to call on, you ought to land on the top shelf."

"I hope to land there some day, but I don't intend to get there through either Mr. Stratton or the president of the road."

"You tell that so straight that one feels almost compelled to believe you."

"I never say what I don't mean," replied Fred.

"Upon my word, Sparks, you're an odd kind of chap. Why, there isn't a clerk in this room but would give his eyeteeth if he could exchange places with you after what you did this afternoon."

Fred laughed.

"Where do you hail from?"

"Edgecomb, Maine."

"What did you work at before you decided to tackle railroading?"

"I was an operator in the employ of the Western Union."

"Why didn't you ask for a job in the train despatcher's office or on the road?"

"I didn't ask for anything in particular. Major Stratton offered to place me in an office job, and I accepted, so here I am."

"And you expect to stick here in spite of your pull?"

"I hope to stick until I can see my way clear to something better."

Fuller thought he saw a mental reservation in Fred's answer, and winking a large wink to himself, said good-night, and the two parted at the corner.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH FRED DEMONSTRATES THAT HE IS ALL TO THE GOOD.

The morning papers had an account of the gallant rescue of Edith Wentworth, daughter of the president of the Eastern Railroad Co., by Fred Sparks, a clerk in the Claim Department of the company; consequently, nearly every employee in the depot building, from the general superintendent down, knew about the occurrence by the time he reached the office.

There was naturally much speculation among the clerks in the different departments as to who the lucky employee was, for, of course, they considered him uncommonly lucky because he had saved the life of the president's daughter.

The clerks in the Claim Department fell over one another in their eagerness to make his acquaintance next morning, and much to their surprise they did not find him puffed-up with a sense of his own suddenly-acquired importance.

On the contrary, they found him a very modest and socially-inclined young fellow, and all took an immediate liking to him.

Fred was preparing to go out to his lunch that day when a messenger summoned him to the office of the general superintendent.

"Sparks," said Mr. Lamport, when the boy appeared before his desk, "you appear to have specially distinguished yourself yesterday afternoon, judging from what I read in the morning papers. I did not call you here, however, to speak about that, but to tell you that the president has just asked me over the 'phone to send you up to his office in the Narragansett Building, so you had better go at once."

"Yes, sir; but I'm not very familiar with Boston yet, and I have no idea where the Narragansett Building is."

"It is on Tremont Street, near—but to make sure that you will not go astray I'll send my messenger with you."

The superintendent summoned his boy and told him to take Fred up to the office of the president of the road.

They boarded a car, and before long entered the building where the executive offices of the company were located.

The superintendent's messenger left him in the general reception-room and hurried back to the depot.

President Wentworth was expecting Fred and shook hands with him when he took the seat beside that official's desk.

We will not record the conversation which took place between them, but will merely say that Mr. Wentworth once more expressed the gratitude he felt toward the boy for saving his daughter's life, and then said he would like to give Fred some substantial evidence of his appreciation.

"How long have you been in the employ of the company?" he asked.

Fred clearly surprised him when he answered, "one day."

The boy told him how he came to connect with the company, and how he expected to advance himself in time to a good position.

Fred plainly let it be known that he had no wish to be any one's favorite, but that he hoped to get ahead by his merits alone.

His attitude made a good impression on the president, and that gentleman assured him that he would see that his ability was fittingly recognized.

"I will keep myself informed of your progress, Sparks," he said, "and you will be promoted as fast as the service will permit and your abilities warrant."

Then, telling Fred not to fail to call at his home some evening soon, dismissed him, and the boy returned to his desk in the Claim Department after getting his lunch.

The other clerks looked at him inquisitively as he sat down to his desk, and wondered if that was to be his last day in that department.

When, however, he turned up next morning as usual, and the day after that, and so on, they began to wonder from a different point of view.

Fred learned the location of Commonwealth Avenue, and the means of getting there from his boarding-house, and on Friday evening he called at Mr. Wentworth's home.

He asked for Miss Edith, and was shown into the parlor while his name was carried upstairs to that young lady.

She retreated to her room to get into one of her best gowns, and in the meanwhile Fred was invited to come upstairs, where he met Mr. Wentworth, and was by him introduced to his wife.

The lady of the house was very gracious to him, and thanked him for the priceless service he had rendered her daughter.

After a little while Edith appeared and welcomed him with unaffected warmth.

She laid herself out to entertain him, and her bright, vivacious ways completely fascinated him, so that when he bade her and her parents good-bye he was desperately smitten with her.

She made him promise that he would call again soon, and he was only too glad to assure her that it would give him great pleasure to do so.

Fred worked steadily in the Claim Department for three months at a somewhat higher rate of salary than the position usually commanded for a beginner.

He did not know that the president had fixed his rate of pay himself, and that he was receiving as much as a clerk who had been in the company's service for two years or more.

The office employees were paid on the first of each month, and on the following day Fred sent his mother a sum equivalent to the wages he had earned during the short time he had worked for the Western Union Company.

This was sufficient to stop the gap made by the loss of his services on the farm, and his mother gradually became reconciled to his absence from home.

During those three months Fred demonstrated the fact that he could work like a Trojan, and also that he was accurate and painstaking in everything he took hold of.

Fuller, the chief clerk, came to look upon him as an employee who could be thoroughly relied upon to pull out in any emergency.

Mr. Bulgin, the chief of the department, noticed that Mr. Lamport, the superintendent, seemed to take a whole lot of interest in Fred.

He wasn't aware, however, that this was occasioned by the periodical requests made to the superintendent by the

president of the road for a report on the boy's progress and general efficiency.

Once during that time a similar request came from the general passenger agent, who was responsible for Fred's appointment.

That official made the inquiry in response to a letter from Major Stratton, who wanted to learn how his protege was getting on.

Altogether, quite unknown to the bright boy, powerful interests were overlooking him with a view to his early advancement in the service.

Everybody but himself seemed to take it for granted that he was slated for rapid promotion as soon as he had been broken into railroading.

Strange to say, this good luck did not give rise to any great amount of jealousy on the part of the other clerks, for Fred had established himself as a general favorite in the department.

He was modest and unassuming in his deportment toward his fellow workers, and was always ready to help any one of his associates out at any time that his own work permitted him to do so.

Although his boarding-house life in a big city like Boston, which was new to him, brought him in contact with many temptations, he managed to steer clear of the acquisition of bad habits that would have seriously impaired his general usefulness.

He visited Edith Wentworth about twice a month, and had firmly established himself not only in the good graces of that young lady, but in the good opinion of her parents as well.

They learned all about his former life, for Fred had no secrets to conceal, and was very frank in telling everything about himself.

In this way Mr. Wentworth got a line on the bent of the boy's ambition, and he decided that it would be ultimately to Fred's advantage if he switched him off from routine office work and afforded him an opportunity to enlarge his scope of railroad knowledge.

Perhaps the president of the road had noticed the growing intimacy between Fred and his daughter, and thought it would be well to prevent it from going too far.

He was too grateful to the lad, and appreciated his manly and independent way, as well as his evident ability to a degree that would not permit him to suggest a curtailment of his visits to the house.

But there are more ways than one of killing a cat, and Mr. Wentworth, whether his daughter was a factor in the case or not, decided that Fred would be more in his element in a road than an office position.

So as a first step to this change he requested the superintendent to transfer the boy, with a strong recommendation, to the freight department of the Boston yards.

The freight yards were about a block from the depot, and there one morning Fred was put to work checking outgoing and incoming freight, and attending to such other work as the agent saw fit to give him to do.

Here he remained for another three months and established as good a reputation for himself as he had done in the Claim Department.

He was getting on swimmingly at his new branch when one morning he was summoned to the office of the general superintendent.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH FRED IS TRANSFERRED.

"Sparks," said Mr. Lamport, when Fred presented himself at his office in response to instructions, "you've been working at the freight sheds for the last three months."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, wondering what was coming.

"I have received very favorable reports of your work from the agent in charge, and as an opportunity offers for your advancement I have decided to push you ahead."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," replied Fred, with a thrill of pleasure.

Had the boy known the truth of the matter he would have found that his promotion had been brought about by the president of the road.

So early an advancement as he was about to get the benefit of was decidedly unusual in the routine of the road, but then he didn't know that.

Most of his fellow clerks at the freight sheds had been anywhere from six to twelve times as long holding down their present jobs as he, and their chance of rising higher was not particularly brilliant at that moment.

He was to be passed over the heads of the whole force of ordinary clerks and given a responsible position on the line.

"I am going to shift you down the road," said the superintendent.

"Down the road, sir!"

"To Cresson Junction. You will start in as assistant to Harlow, the agent. In thirty days we expect you to be competent to take charge of the station yourself."

Fred was staggered.

He was actually going to be made a station agent.

He was delighted beyond measure, and yet he hated to get away from Boston—and Edith Wentworth.

There was no getting away from the fact that he was dead gone on the president's daughter, though there was little likelihood that that fact would do him any good.

He was a poor boy, dependent on his own exertions for a livelihood, while she was the only child of a rich and influential man.

The boon of her society for the past six months would henceforth be as a sweet dream to him, nothing more.

"This is more than I expected so soon, sir," he said to Mr. Lamport.

"You will not return to the freight sheds," said the superintendent. "You will need a few hours to get your traps in order to start."

"When do I go to Cresson?"

"On the Portsmouth accommodation, No. 233, which pulls out of the station at six."

Fred thought his transfer a quick one.

He wondered if he would have a chance to call on Edith, tell her he was shifted out of Boston and wish her good-bye.

The superintendent drew a map toward him, ran his finger along the main line of the Eastern road till it paused at a spot where a short branch line diverged from it.

"Here you are," he said. "Cresson Junction, 110 miles east of Boston. Harlow has been instructed to secure ac-

commodations for you, and will be on the lookout for you to-night. Call at half-past two. I will have your orders written out, and all other papers necessary. You can look them over on the train."

Fred went directly home, told his landlady that he had been suddenly ordered out of the city, squared his account with her to date, and went to his room to pack his two grips.

He carried them with him to a restaurant, ate his dinner and rode down to the depot, where he left his property in the baggage-room to be called for.

It was now close to half-past two, so he repaired to the superintendent's office once more.

"Mr. Lamport has been called away," said the messenger. "Your name is Sparks, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"Come inside. There is an envelope for you on the superintendent's desk that he told me to give you when you came here."

It was addressed: "Frederick Sparks, Cresson Junction."

"Mr. Lamport told me to tell you that there is a pass to Cresson Junction in the envelope. He also said that your time at the freight sheds has been made up and that if you apply at the paymaster's office you will get your money."

"All right," replied Fred.

He hurried to the designated room on that floor, received his wages to date and then, looking at the clock, calculated that he had time enough to pay Edith a brief visit.

As the car was passing up Washington Street he happened to glance out of the window, and to his surprise saw Edith and her mother standing in front of a big retail dry goods store talking to a gentleman and lady.

He sprang from the car and hastened over to them.

"Why, Fred!" exclaimed Edith, when the boy touched her on the arm. "This is quite a surprise!"

She shook hands with him in a way that showed she was delighted to meet him, while her mother nodded and smiled.

Fred drew the girl a little aside.

"I was just going to your house to see you," he said.

"Indeed!" she replied, in surprise.

"I wanted to bid you good-bye."

"Bid me good-bye!" she ejaculated, in not a little astonishment. "What for?"

"I leave Boston at six to-night."

"At six! Are you going home for some reason?" she asked, with a serious look.

"No. I'm going to Cresson Junction."

"What for?"

"I've been shifted."

"Shifted!"

"Yes. The superintendent ordered me to report at that station to-night."

"Isn't this rather sudden?" she asked, with a look of concern.

"It is sudden. I only heard about the change at eleven to-day."

"And you expect to remain there for awhile?" she asked, evidently not pleased at the idea of losing him.

"For some time, I guess. I'm to be the station agent there after thirty days."

"I'm sorry you're going to leave Boston," with a suspicious moisture in her eyes.

"I wouldn't mind it if it wasn't for——"

"For what?" she asked, as he stopped.

"Leaving you," he blurted out, with a look that she readily interpreted and which called a bright blush to her cheeks. "I've learned to think a whole lot of you, Edith," he went on in a low tone. "I know I haven't any right to, but I—well, I can't help it. You've been very kind and nice to me—as nice as a sister, and I shall be lonesome and homesick away from you. I should like to think that you—well, what's the use of talking?" he said, huskily. "I don't amount to anything, while you—you're rich and have lots of friends, and I am nothing to you."

She saw the moisture in his eyes, while his tones thrilled her, and she laid her daintily-gloved hand on his arm.

"Don't talk nonsense, Fred," she said, in a low, soft tone.

"You are something to me. I don't want you to go, but if you must, I shall not forget you. I shall think of you every day and long for the time to come when I may see you again."

"Do you mean that, Edith?" he asked, eagerly.

"I do. You must write to me and I will answer your letters. You won't forget to do that?"

"Forget, Edith? Never! Never as long as I live. I only wish——"

"What do you wish?" she asked, looking at him with glistening eyes.

"Don't ask me, Edith. I have no right even to breathe the thought of such a thing. Your father and mother would be very angry if they thought I was so presumptuous as to dream of crossing the gulf that lies between us. At any rate I never would be considered worthy of aspiring to what was beyond my reach."

"I think I understand you, Fred," she said, with a look that set his blood tingling in his veins. "Shall I give you a watchword? It is 'Hope.' There is nothing that may not be won by perseverance and a brave heart. You have both. Then why be discouraged at the outset? The gulf you speak about may be bridged and the object you seek gained."

"But you do not know the prize I would win."

"Perhaps I can guess," she replied, looking down.

"Oh, Edith, if I only dared hope that I had even the ghost of a chance."

"Foolish boy! Can't you see that you have every——"

"Edith," interrupted her mother at this point, "you will have to excuse yourself to Mr. Sparks. We have scarcely time to make our purchases, for we are due at Mrs. Prescott's at five."

"Mother, Fred is going to leave Boston. He is wishing me good-bye."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Wentworth, who already knew that the young railroader was slated for an out-of-town position. "When do you leave town?"

"At six to-night."

"Then I suppose I must say good-bye to you. You will call on us, of course, whenever you return to the city."

"Certainly, Mrs. Wentworth. Good-bye."

They shook hands and the lady turned toward the entrance of the store.

"Good-bye, Edith."

"Good-bye, Fred. Remember the watchword—'Hope.'"

"Then I may hope—you promise me that?" eagerly.

"Yes, have I not said so? Good-bye."

And so they parted, Fred taking a car back to the depot, and wondering if his chance of ultimately winning Edith Wentworth was within the bounds of probability.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH FRED ARRIVES AT CRESSON JUNCTION.

At quarter past nine that night the Portsmouth local, No. 233, stopped at Cresson Junction, and several passengers, including Fred Sparks, alighted on the long platform.

Fred walked into the waiting-room of the station, which was lighted by a large reflector lamp, in time to see a square-built man come out of the little office where the tickets were sold, and other clerical work connected with the station done.

The boy stopped and looked at him.

He guessed this might be Harlow, the station agent.

He was not wrong in his surmise.

Harlow looked at him and was prepared to recognize him as his new assistant, and the lad who was to relieve him at the end of thirty days.

"Are you Mr. Harlow?" asked Fred.

"That's my name. You are Frederick Sparks, I guess?"

"Correct. Glad to know you, Mr. Harlow."

"Same here," answered the agent.

They shook hands.

"Come inside and we'll have a talk, then I'll take you over to your boarding place. The lady who owns the house is a widow. You'll find her a nice person. I've known her ever since I came to the Junction."

They entered the little office, which Fred viewed with a certain sense of proprietorship, as he felt that he would be in full charge a month hence.

"You are young for a station agent," began Harlow, after they were seated. "How came you to catch on? Got a pull?"

His words struck Fred like an unpleasant blow.

It had never occurred to him until that moment that his promotion was due to anything other than his own ability and strict attention to business.

Now there flitted across his mind a vision in which Major Stratton and President Wentworth stood forth with great clearness.

He began to realize that one of these gentlemen, probably the latter, had been the lever that had moved him from Boston to Cresson, and shoved him up a notch.

To a boy like Fred this was not a palatable cud to chew.

Harlow's question was so direct that he had to answer it somehow, though it was embarrassing for him to admit that influence had anything to do with his transfer.

"I'm acquainted with the president of the road and also with one of the directors, but I never asked for nor desired their influence," he replied.

Harlow coughed incredulously.

He knew that advancement along the line went largely by favor.

Only a chump would refuse to avail himself of the influence of a friend at court, and certainly this boy didn't look like a chump, even in the most remote degree.

"How long have you been with the road?" he asked.

"Six months."

That settled any doubt he might have entertained concerning the boy's pull.

"I've been instructed to break you into the job," said Harlow. "I think it won't take me thirty days to do that, for you look as smart as chain lightning. You're an operator, of course? I need hardly ask you that, since it is essential to the job."

"I am."

"How did you learn? At a school?"

"No. I was taught by a Western Union man and took his place with the company until I resigned to go rail-roading."

"I guess you're all right. Well, I'll soon show you the ropes. You won't find your regular duties hard, for there isn't much going over the branch at this time of the year. It's a sort of summer line in the main—goes to Lakeview and connects with the navigation company's steamers. It isn't the work—it's care that killed the cat."

"You refer to the responsibilities of the position, I suppose?"

"Yes; you'll find them unusual."

"In what way?"

"In several ways. You'll get on to some of them before I leave. Mooney is the worst."

"Who's Mooney?"

"He's the night operator. Goes on at six. He's away to-night. I don't know where he is."

"Oh! What's the matter with him?"

"He drinks."

"How does he hold his job?"

"Pull."

That word was hateful to Fred, and it prejudiced him against Mooney.

"Doesn't he attend to his business?"

"Yes—after a fashion. He isn't attending to it to-night."

"Is he drunk?"

"Probably. That isn't the worst, however. I suspect that he stands in with a bad crowd around here."

"What about this gang?"

"They're night-hawks. Always up to some kind of rascality. You must always keep your weather eye lifting after dark; if you don't——"

"Well?"

"You'll regret it, that's all. I'm glad to get away from this joint. Another six months of it would turn my hair gray."

"Pleasant prospect for me," said Fred, squaring his jaws. Harlow observed the action.

"You'll get along, probably, for I can see you have grit."

"Well, haven't you?"

"I've none to spare. I can't stand continuous worry."

"I never worry—if I can help myself," replied Fred.

"It would take a cast-iron man not to worry here."

"Well, I suppose I'm up against it; but you can paste this in your hat—I mean to do my duty or break a leg."

As Harlow couldn't leave the station he got the watchman to take Fred over to the place he had selected as a home for the boy while he remained at Cresson Junction.

Fred rather liked the little widow who owned the house, while the room seemed to be satisfactory in every respect.

He appeared at the station next morning at seven ready to submit to the breaking-in process, and Harlow was on

hand to give him an insight into the manifold duties of a station agent.

There was not such a great number of way-bills to be made out, nor tickets asked for, during the day, as he had expected.

Still, there was a whole lot to attend to in one way or another.

After he had set all the lights up and down the track, which ended his duties for the day, Harlow told him that the day's work was a fair sample of what he might expect to have to handle at that season of the year.

"That so?" replied the boy. "Then I should say you've had a fairly easy time of it, take it all together."

"I never had a kick coming on account of the work, even in the summer, when things are a bit lively. No; it's what is liable to happen at night that's kept me awake for hours after I turned in."

"What's that got to do with you? It's up to Mooney, I should imagine."

"No, I'm the agent. If anything serious happened while Mooney was on I'd have to shoulder the responsibility."

While he was talking with Harlow, a short, chunky, smooth-faced man came into the station and walked into the office.

"That's Mooney," said the agent. "Come, I'll introduce you to him. You might as well make his acquaintance first as last."

So they followed the night operator inside.

"Mooney," said Harlow, "this is Fred Sparks, who takes charge here on the first of next month. Sparks, I'll make you acquainted with Phil Mooney."

Mooney sized Fred up to his own satisfaction at one glance, and he grinned sardonically.

"So they're sendin' boys out now to run the stations, are they?" he chuckled. "I wish ye luck, young feller, but I'm afeared ye'll have yer hands full."

"I was telling him that things were rather strenuous around here at times," said Harlow.

"I s'pose ye told him I was a soak, too, eh?" replied the night operator, with an unpleasant chuckle.

"I did tell him that you crooked your elbow too often on occasions, which is the truth, unfortunately."

"It ain't your funeral!" snarled the operator.

"But it will cause yours one of these days."

"Huh! Forget it."

Click! Click-click!

Mooney turned around and sat down before the table on which the station call—D. G. 13—was sounding, sharp, clear and distinct, on the little brass instrument.

Fred's ear translated the message as it came over the wire and Mooney wrote it out with a pencil on a pad.

It came from the next station on the Boston side, and was something to cause the three to sit up and take notice.

It ran as follows:

"An engine, running wild at a two-forty clip, just passed, bound east, on down track. You have barely time to switch runaway before Express No. 66 is due at Junction."

Fred easily understood the import of the message.

The runaway held possession of the track supposed to be clear for the Boston and Portland Express, which should pass Cresson Junction in six minutes.

Unless the wild engine was promptly switched on to the branch track, which at that hour was clear all the way to Lakeview, there would be trouble to burn.

Clearly there was no time to be lost if a disaster was to be averted.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH FRED AVERTS A HEAD-ON COLLISION.

Fred, after a glance at the clock, was the first to make a move.

He seized a lantern that stood on the floor, dashed out of the office, and ran down the track with the switch key in his hand.

It was a dark night and the sky was threatening rain.

To the eastward whence the express was coming on at a high rate of speed the track lay straight as a die for a mile or more in the gloom.

In the opposite direction the track took a curve a quarter of a mile from the station and disappeared behind the trees.

The station was the only bright object in the landscape, but beyond it, some little distance away, were the straggling lights of Cresson.

Fred hustled to make the switch that would shunt the wild engine off the main track on to the branch.

With no means of making steam the runaway would then probably "die" before it got as far as Lakeview, which station would of course be notified of its coming.

There was a thick mass of shrubbery near the switch, and as Fred placed the lantern on the ground and stooped to unlock the lever a man's face was thrust through the bushes.

The boy's face was thrown into relief by the light, and the man in the background saw it quite distinctly.

He uttered a low exclamation of surprise, which was followed by a deep imprecation.

He pushed his way through the shrubbery, and creeping toward the switch suddenly threw himself upon Fred and bore him to the ground.

A pair of wiry fingers sought for the boy's throat, but Fred, though taken completely by surprise, was not easily subdued.

The thought flashed across his mind that he was up against one of the night prowlers mentioned by the station agent, and he was fully resolved that the rascal should not find him an easy mark.

A desperate struggle for the mastery immediately ensued.

The knowledge that more even than his own safety depended on the outcome of the scrap nerved the boy to put forth his utmost efforts to win out.

By a quick movement he squirmed out of the man's clutch and rolled over on his back, the better to see what kind of antagonist he was facing.

The rascal, however, jumped on his chest and tried to hold him down.

Fred caught a look of his face, reflected in the light of the lantern, and gave a gasp of astonishment.

It was Rowley, one of the two men he had had trouble with along Snake River, near his home, and whom he supposed was safely lodged in State prison for attempted highway robbery, of which crime Major Stratton had nearly been the victim.

"Oh, it's you, you villain!" cried Fred.

"Yer recognize me, do yer?" hissed Rowley, pausing in his efforts and glaring down at the boy.

"Yes, I know you."

"Yer'll know me better when I'm done with yer. I owe yer somethin' for gettin' me pinched, and helpin' to send me up, and I always pay my debts!"

"You only got what was coming to you."

"Did I git it?" chuckled the rascal.

"I'm afraid not. A screw must have worked loose somewhere. You got ten years, and here it isn't ten months and you're free."

"Jest so. So ye're workin' for the railroad, are yer? Yer won't work long, I'm thinkin'. I'll fix yer so ye'll lay up in the hospital for awhile, drat yer!"

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," replied Fred.

He made a sudden shift of his body, exerting all his strength at the same time.

He threw Rowley over so that they lay side by side with their heads touching the side of the rail.

The villain struggled hard to regain the mastery, but Fred's muscles of steel held him down, though he could not get on top of himself.

"Blast yer!" gritted Rowley. "I'll git the best of yer yet!"

"You only think you will. I'm not a chicken."

After another ineffectual struggle, both stopped with one accord to regain their breath.

Then it was that Fred's alert ears caught the first faint vibrations telegraphed along the rail of the approaching runaway engine from the west.

He was facing in that direction, too, and presently the headlight of the locomotive came into sight around the curve a mile away.

The sight of that glaring white eye cutting its way through the darkness awoke the boy to the realization that everything depended on the issue of the next few seconds.

The switch was unlocked, and all he had to do was to pull the lever.

But he must reach it first, and to accomplish the job he must shake off Rowley in an effectual way.

As he gripped the rascal for a fresh effort Rowley seemed to understand his purpose, for his fingers got busy, too.

While they struggled fiercely in each other's embrace the wild engine was rushing down on them at a lively gait.

The glare of the headlight was now upon them.

In a moment or two the runaway would have passed the switch.

At that tense moment the boy heard the long-drawn-out whistle of the express up the track as it passed Bailey's Crossing, three-quarters of a mile distant.

It was approaching like a whirlwind, and no power on earth could avert a head-on collision with the runaway if the latter got by the switch.

With a cry of desperate earnestness Fred put forth every inch of power he possessed.

He fairly rose into a sitting position with Rowley at arms-length in his grasp.

Then with a sudden swing he threw the man down.

Rowley's head hit the rail with a thud that jarred every bit of consciousness out of him.

The boy struggled on his feet, weak and dizzy from the tension he had been through.

The runaway engine was right on top of him almost, with rapidly-moving drivers, coming out of the darkness like some mysterious phantom of the night, its eye glaring ahead like an ogre's.

The sudden wild screech of "down brakes" came thrillingly through the air from up the track.

The engineer of the express had seen the approaching headlight dead ahead on the same track, and knew something was wrong, for no train should be coming in that direction on the north track.

As he had been assured of a clear track to Berwick by the signals displayed at Tower No. 16, two miles back, he had supposed, when he first caught sight of the headlight, that it came from the locomotive of the night freight drawn up on the long siding at the Junction.

The air-brakes were instantly applied, but with a momentum of nearly a mile a minute to overcome, there was little chance of stoppage that side of Cresson.

As Fred sprang forward, seized the lever of the switch and pulled it over, he saw the headlight of the express dangerously near.

A second or two later the runaway engine dashed up and then glided off on to the branch with a rumble and a quiver of its big driving wheels.

Until it had passed Fred's heart was in his mouth, then he pushed the lever over and locked it with a thrill of thanksgiving at his heart.

The crisis past, his strength gave way all at once, and he collapsed beside the switch.

The engineer of the express saw the switchlight turn from white to a blood red, denoting a blocked track, as Fred pulled the lever over, and his blood ran cold, for he knew his train could not be halted before reaching the switch.

Then he saw the glowing headlight before him suddenly disappear and the switchlight return to a white, or clear track, and with a cry of relief he whistled "off brakes" and threw off the reverse lever.

So, as Fred half crouched, half lay, beside the switch, the ponderous express train flew past in safety with a rush and roar, and soon vanished around the curve on its way to Boston.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH FRED FINDS HIMSELF UP AGAINST MOONEY.

While Fred reclined half exhausted beside the switch, Rowley recovered his senses, staggered to his feet, and looked around in a dazed way.

Then, muttering incoherent expressions under his breath, he reeled off into the bushes and disappeared, without noticing the boy in the gloom.

Finally Fred pulled himself together, got up, took the key out of the switch lock, picked up the lantern and retraced his steps to the station.

"What's the matter with you, Sparks?" asked Harlow, regarding his assistant with some surprise. "You look as white as a sheet."

"I nearly missed connections, that's all."

"I noticed you were a long time getting the switch open. What was the trouble? Wouldn't the key work well?"

"It worked all right, but I was jumped by a rascal who must have been hiding somewhere down there, and I had the time of my life getting the best of him."

"Oh, that was it, eh? One of the night prowlers tried to rob you. A bad moment to be up against those scamps. So you beat him off?"

"If I hadn't done him up there'd have been a smash-up on the line. I barely had time to switch the runaway when the express was on me."

"Thank Heaven things turned out all right!" said Harlow. "You've had a taste of what's before you if you remain at the station any time."

"What's the matter with the police force of Cresson? Why don't they clean the night-birds out?"

"They've tried it and failed. The prowlers keep out of sight whenever there's an officer around. To trace them to their retreats has proved an impossible job."

"I know the chap who attacked me. He and his pal were convicted of highway robbery at Glendale, Maine, about fifteen miles from where my folks live, and they were sentenced to ten years in State prison. That happened six months ago, and I can't understand how this fellow happens to be at liberty, unless he escaped."

On their way up the road to Cresson, Fred told Harlow the incidents which led to his acquaintance with Rowley and Jobkins, as well as his adventure in the field by the river road when he saved Major Stratton from being robbed.

"I see," remarked the station agent. "The rascal evidently managed to make his escape in some way. Now he's hanging around this neighborhood, or tramping it to Boston. He's got it in for you because of your hand in sending him up. It is probable that he'll get away from this locality as fast as he can, as he knows you have recognized him, and will put the police on his track."

"I'll go to the station-house at once, if you'll show me the way."

"I'll do that willingly."

When they reached the station-house in Cresson Fred told his story, and assured the chief of the force that Rowley was an escaped convict and ought to be recaptured.

The officer said he would send men out to try and catch him.

Fred was satisfied and returned to his boarding place.

The Cresson police caught Rowley next day several miles from the Junction, and he was returned to the prison from which he had escaped.

As for the night prowlers, they kept very quiet during the four weeks that Fred was learning how to run the station, and Harlow remarked that he guessed they had abandoned their old stamping-grounds.

At length the first of the month came around and with it the pay-car.

As soon as Harlow got his money he bade Fred good-bye and the boy was left in full charge of the station.

At no time up to this point had the work been very hard, and consequently Fred had enjoyed a cinch while Harlow was around to help out; now that he was alone he did not apprehend that he would be overcrowded.

He had written three times to Edith, and had received two replies, penned in her neatest style on fine note paper bearing an embossed monogram.

On the day Harlow left he got an answer to his last letter,

and its contents made him very happy, for the girl wrote more confidently than usual.

He read the letter several times during the day, and after supper, when in the seclusion of his own room, he put his hand in his pocket to get it for another perusal.

It was not there.

He searched all his pockets in vain for it, and then he recollected that while reading it that afternoon he had been interrupted by a message over the wire, and had laid it on a shelf in the office.

The message had taken his attention off it, and subsequent duties so engrossed his time that he had forgotten it.

Then the thought struck him that Mooney, the night operator, might notice it and take the liberty of reading it.

Not for a good deal would he have the man do that.

He determined to walk to the station, which was only a short distance away, and recover Edith's letter.

Besides, he would see how the night man was getting on.

So Fred put on his hat and went over to the Junction.

He glanced in through the ticket window as he walked to the door of the office.

Mooney was sitting with his chair tilted back, his feet on the table where the instrument was, a black bottle at his lips.

Until that moment Fred supposed that the operator confined his drinking to the tavern, as it was against the company's regulations to bring liquor into the station for consumption on the premises.

Now he understood what the late station agent meant when he said that his responsibilities were "unusual."

Suppose Mooney was to drink too much from that bottle some night and go to sleep, what might not happen?

If an accident occurred on the line owing to the failure of some operator at another station to get the Junction on the wire the blame might rest on him.

His career might be blasted at the outset, and then how could he hope ever to win Edith Wentworth, the bright star of his life?

It was with an anxious look on his face that Fred walked into the office and stepped toward the shelf on which the letter he had come for lay undisturbed.

Mooney whisked the bottle out of sight and glared in an unfriendly way at the new agent.

"What brought you back?" he snarled.

"This letter," replied Fred, as he put it in his pocket.

"Humph! I thought you came to spy on me."

"Why should I do that?" replied the boy, looking him in the eye.

Mooney showed a momentary confusion, then he grew defiant.

"Because Harlow may have told you to watch me."

"Why should he tell me to do that?" asked Fred, calmly.

"He told you I drank—hard, didn't he?"

"He did."

"I don't deny it," snorted the operator, still more defiantly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, as long as you drink away from the station."

"And suppose I take a few snifters here in the office—what then?"

"It's against the company's rules."

"To Halifax with the company's rules!" gritted Mooney.

"I do my work all right. I've never been reported. I'll drink when and where I please."

"I think you'd better cut the bottle out here," replied Fred, coolly.

"Who says so—you?" sneeringly.

"It's not doing you any good."

"That's my business."

"And mine," replied the boy, firmly.

"Yours! Confound you for a young whippersnapper, with your swelled head because you're the agent. Well, I'm thinking you won't last. It takes a man to run this station, not a beardless kid. Things are coming to a pretty pass when the super sends one of his favorites to lord it over a veteran like me. I won't stand it!"

Mooney brought his hand down on the table with a blow that made his pencil and pad jump.

"I won't stand it," he repeated. "Do you understand that?"

Fred made no reply, but looked him straight in the eye.

The operator writhed under his steady gaze.

There was something in the boy's eye that disconcerted him.

"Don't look at me that way!" he screamed. "Don't!" waving his arms wildly in front of his face. "You put me in mind of him!"

"Him! Who do you mean?"

Mooney shrank back in his chair and made no answer.

Fred stepped forward, picked up the black bottle where the man had attempted to hide it, opened the window and threw it out.

The crash of glass against the track aroused the operator.

He looked for his bottle as Fred was closing the window, saw it was gone and sprang to his feet in a rage.

"You've thrown it away!" he frothed.

"I have. I won't stand for anything like that in this station."

With a howl like a furious beast Mooney sprang at the boy.

"I'll break your neck!" he hissed. "You sha'n't boss it over me. I'll half kill you!"

In another moment the two had grappled in a desperate struggle.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH FRED TAKES THE STARCH OUT OF PHIL MOONEY.

They swayed to and fro around the small office, banging up against the telegraph table, against the walls and getting tangled up with the chairs.

Mooney had come to the office with something of a jag on, and had been loading up since from the black bottle.

He was in a bad humor, and Fred's return had only aggravated it.

He had a standing grouch anyway against the young agent because he was a boy, and somebody's favorite, as he believed.

Having worked himself into a crazy fit, he was in a condition to do Fred a bad injury.

The boy saw that he was up against it hard, for Mooney was no mean antagonist.

He didn't want to hurt the operator if he could help it, but he soon saw that it was a question of downing the man or being downed himself.

Suddenly his feet were tripped from under him, and he went down with Mooney on top.

The shock dazed him, and he lay helpless.

The night operator uttered a shout of satisfaction, and picked up a heavy wrench that lay within his reach to hit the boy.

As he raised his arm to give the blow the sharp call of the Junction—D. G. 13—came from the instrument on the table, repeated over and over.

It seemed to recall Mooney to a sense of his duty.

He dropped the wrench, jumped off his intended victim and staggered over to the table where he answered the call, and the following message was clicked off:

"Hold freight No. 61 on siding for special to pass. Repeat."

Mooney repeated the message back to the operator, and then came "O. K." back to him.

Fred, coming out of his daze, heard the message clearly.

It was the night operator's business, as soon as the "O. K." reached him, to set the switchlight, three hundred yards back.

This he could do, without leaving the office, by means of a rod within his reach.

Mechanically he threw out his hand to grasp the rod, but as his senses were somewhat confused he got hold of the wrong one and set the switch-light at the opposite end of the station.

Then he threw himself back in his chair, having apparently forgotten all about the young station agent.

In a few moments he began to nod, and by the time Fred got on his feet he was snoring loudly.

The boy regarded him with a disgusted and troubled air.

Mooney was apparently useless for some hours, if not for the remainder of the night.

Fred would have to stand his "trick."

That was an awkward predicament to be placed in, for besides losing his proper rest he had but an imperfect knowledge of the night routine.

Some of the calls he probably would not understand and confusion would result.

However, there was no help for it.

The first thing he did was to drag Mooney, chair and all, out into the waiting-room, where he left him near the stove.

Then he returned to the office, took up the train sheets and tried to familiarize himself with the situation.

While he was thus engaged he heard the rumble of the approaching freight, which he knew must be No. 61, ordered to be held up on the siding until a special following with right of way had passed.

Without looking at the switchlight rods, for he had seen Mooney reach out and set what he naturally supposed was the proper one, Fred picked up the lantern and started for the platform.

He opened the door just in time to be dazzled by the headlight of the freight as it came up and dashed by with a rumble and roar.

The engineer showed no disposition to slow down, and the boy gazed upon the speeding cars in great astonishment.

He couldn't understand why the driver had disregarded the signal.

Could Mooney have made a mistake?

He turned pale with apprehension and dashed back into the office.

Glancing at the rods, he saw that the night operator had indeed blundered.

The question was, could he repair the matter?

His hand reached for the proper rod, but had barely touched it when the electric bell told him that the train had already traversed the signal circuit.

"Too late!" groaned Fred. "I'll have to hold up the special to save it, and that is bound to lead to no end of a row. No—there's one chance yet to mend matters. If I can get Tower No. 16 in time I'll be all right."

His fingers dropped to the telegraph key.

With feverish speed he sent the call to the operator at the tower.

The response came back immediately.

Then he wired: "Back Freight No. 61."

The operator's O. K. came back to him and the instrument became silent.

As a precautionary measure he set the block signal that should have been displayed by Mooney, so that in case the freight did not get back before the special came around the curve the latter would be stopped.

He took the lantern and went to the door to watch for the return of the freight, and in a short time he saw it backing down the main track.

He got it on to the siding just as the special came in sight, and he hastened to set the block signal back to "a clear track ahead."

Mooney snored all through the night and awoke at sunrise fairly sober.

He was astonished to find himself sitting out in the waiting-room.

He made for the office at once and found Fred taking down a despatch.

"What does this mean?" he growled. "What are you doing here?"

"Taking your place so that things would go right," replied the boy, coolly.

"How did I get outside?"

"I put you there."

"You did?"

"After receiving an important message, and then setting the wrong signal, you fell back in your chair helplessly intoxicated."

"I did?" replied Mooney, in a dazed way.

"Yes. Had you been alone here there would have been a wreck up the road. Now, Mr. Mooney, this sort of business has gone as far as I'm going to let it. You've got to promise me right now that you'll come on duty sober, and that you won't bring any more black bottles into the office. Refuse to agree to that and I'll ask for your immediate transfer. You know well enough that I'll be called on for my reason for making the request. Well, it won't be to your advantage for it to reach the ears of the superintendent. That's all I've got to say. It's up to you now to say which it shall be—your promise or your transfer."

The operator flung a black look at Fred, and seemed disposed to be ugly, but the boy took him up short.

"Last night before you succumbed you attacked me for throwing your bottle out of the window. You got me on

the floor and took up a wrench to brain me. You would have done it, too, but for the Junction call which called you back to a glimmering of your duty. Now it is in my power to order your arrest for that."

"It's a lie!" cried Mooney, hoarsely. "I never attacked you."

"I'll let the magistrate decide that unless you haul in your horns," replied Fred, sternly. "Now, are you going to turn over a new leaf, or aren't you?"

Although the night operator felt an intense feeling of resentment against the young station agent he could not help recognizing in him his master.

The boy had him in his power, and so Mooney threw up the sponge and promised to be "good."

Thenceforth Fred had no further trouble with him of any importance.

Winter came on, wore away and merged into spring, and everything ran smoothly at the Junction.

The first of May was close at hand, and Fred had been just one year in the employ of the Eastern Railroad Co. when something happened.

Fred got a hint of coming advancement through Edith's last letter.

She couldn't tell him exactly what was on the tapis, but she had heard her father tell her mother that certain changes about to be put into force by the company would enable him to advance Fred Sparks to a more responsible job than he now held.

"Father says you have shown yourself to be a boy in a thousand," the letter concluded, "and that he will be much surprised if you don't rise to become the general superintendent of the road some day. If you only guessed how happy it made me to hear him say that. With my watchword ever before you, you are slowly bridging the gulf that you said lies between something you wish for very much, aren't you—dear? Mamma has noticed that I have a very regular correspondent at Cresson Junction, and as she knows you are the station agent there of course she naturally draws her own conclusions. She must have told papa, for the other night he took me on his lap, and drawing my head on his shoulder, asked me who it was I was so interested in at Cresson Junction. Just as if he didn't know! What do you suppose I said? 'The bravest and best boy in all the world, papa—the boy who risked his life to save mine.' Papa smiled and said I should have added 'the smartest boy,' as well. I am sure he thinks a great deal of you, and means to help you all he can, but it is up to you, dear, to cross the gulf; and you will do it, I know. Then you'll find 'somebody's sweetheart' waiting with outstretched arms for the dearest, the bravest, the best and the smartest (underscored) boy in all the world. Lovingly, your own Edith."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH FRED IS MADE ACTING SUPERINTENDENT OF THE LAKEVIEW BRANCH.

One morning a dapper little man, with a curt, business-like air, dropped off the Boston & Portland east-bound express, which slowed up, but did not wholly stop at Cresson Junction.

Fred was making out a way-bill for a carload of stuff that

was about to be shipped to Boston, and was rather surprised to see a stranger march into his office with the assurance of one who had the right to do so.

"Well, sir?" asked the young agent, brusquely.

"You're the station agent, I believe?" said the stranger, sharply.

"I am."

"Your name is Sparks?"

"That's right," replied Fred, in some surprise.

"I'm the traveling inspector of the road," said the intruder, tossing a card on the shelf in front of the ticket window where the boy was writing.

Fred glanced at the card and then at the man, who now had a bundle of papers in his hands.

He had heard of this gentleman, and knew that he was an important executive officer of the line.

His unceremonious entrance was therefore explained, and Fred wondered what business had brought him to the Junction.

"There is to be a change at this station," said the inspector, briskly.

"A change!" ejaculated Fred.

"Exactly. A new agent."

"Oh! And what about me?"

"You're shifted a peg higher."

"I do not quite understand," replied Fred, rather bewildered by the short, crisp way in which the inspector imparted his news.

"Here are your official instructions," said the company's representative, handing Fred a bulky envelope which bore the imprint of the superintendent's office.

It was addressed to "Frederick Sparks, Acting Superintendent, Lakeview Branch, Eastern Railroad Co., Cresson Junction."

Fred's eyes expanded to the size of small saucers.

"What does this mean?" he gasped.

"Plain enough, isn't it? You've been promoted."

"But the Lakeview Branch hasn't such a thing as a superintendent," protested Fred, who under other circumstances would have laughed at the idea of the short line to the lake, which was scarcely more than a summer road, having an official to supervise its operations.

He had done that since he came to the Junction, and had not found it a laborious or intricate addition to his regular work.

One small train, hauling both freight and a few passengers, came down the branch line every morning, Sundays excepted, and returned every afternoon.

That comprised the whole of the traffic of the Lakeview Branch during the six months Fred had been in charge.

He knew that on the first of the month this service was to be doubled, as it was each year at that time, when the Navigation Company put a second steamer in commission, and that during July and August extra passenger trains were put on to accommodate the summer travel to and from the half a dozen big hotels in the neighborhood of Lakeview, but Harlow had told him that he had attended to all the business connected with the branch, though it crowded him pretty closely during the busy season.

"What does the envelope say?" replied the inspector in answer to his remark.

"It says 'Acting Superintendent of Lakeview Branch,' but——"

"That ought to be sufficient. New official."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fred, beginning to understand that the position had just been created to meet some new conditions in the business.

"The situation along the branch is about to undergo a change. You understand, of course, that its sphere of usefulness enlarges about this time of the year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Hereafter the branch will become a more important part of the system. After this summer the steamers will not run to Bunkport, where they connect with the Eastern Division of the road."

"No?" replied Fred.

"No," answered the inspector, emphatically. "The company is about to continue the branch from Lakeview to Bunkport. Construction will begin immediately. When the line is fully completed it will be known as the Lakeview & Bunkport Branch, and you will take charge exclusively. Now you understand why a superintendent."

"But," said Fred, "I've only been a year in the company's service. Isn't my promotion to such an important post somewhat——"

"Unusual? Granted; but you have the confidence of the superintendent. He believes you to be a young man of unusual ability—one in a thousand, in fact. The road is always on the lookout for evidence of special ability on the part of its employees and when it comes to the front it is recognized. Understand?"

"I think I do."

"Further, you have the strongest kind of backing. The president——"

"I object to owing my advancement to influence, or, as it is called, a pull."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders and looked at the boy in a quizzical way.

"Don't talk nonsense, Sparks," he said, sharply. "I may say in your case that merit goes hand in hand with influence. The superintendent, looking over the persons available to fill the post of superintendent of the branch when it shall have been completed, put his finger on you as one familiar in a general way with the working of the line to Lakeview. It has been under your charge since you came here. This office has been running as smooth as silk under your charge. There is no complaint. Naturally this shows that you are a valuable man. Valuable men are scarce. It was hardly necessary for the president to put in a good word for you, but he feels a certain interest in you. I think you saved the life of his only daughter. Naturally he is grateful. My advice to you is—don't worry about pull. Take the good things of life as they come—your way. I always do."

Fred bowed, for the argument was against him.

"When does this change go into effect?"

"On the first. Your office will be at the Junction till further notice. The salary will be——"

The inspector mentioned a very substantial increase over Fred's present income.

What wonderful news he would have to communicate to Edith in his next letter, unconscious that the girl of his heart already knew all about the matter.

The inspector took his leave and Fred saw him through the window making notes with a view to certain needed improvements.

That afternoon he went to Lakeview to make further observations, and from there he went on to Bunkport.

Unknown to the young station agent the extension from Lakeview to Bunkport had already been surveyed and the right of way secured.

Two nights later a construction train, loaded with men and material, reached the Junction and was switched on to the branch.

Next day ground was broken south of Lakeview, and after that there was great activity in that direction.

On the morning of the first of May an early local dropped the new station agent at the Junction.

His name was Frank Jones.

He was a young man of twenty-two, and Fred took an immediate liking for him, which feeling was reciprocated.

Fred's instructions required him to exercise a general supervision over the Junction.

He had to attend to freight collections and other outside business.

His duties would take him to Lakeview, where the present agent was a woman operator who lived in the building, and ultimately to Bunkport when the road was in operation at that point.

Fred easily saw that when the branch connected the main line and the eastern division of the road it would develop into quite an important part of the system, and he felt a pardonable pride in the reflection that he would be at the head of its affairs.

It was a big step forward for a lad of his years, and put him in direct line for the position of a division superintendent.

Fred made his first trip to Lakeview the day after the new agent got into harness.

Mrs. Somers, the lady agent, was expecting to make his acquaintance, but she hardly anticipated seeing one so young holding a position that on completion of the branch to Bunkport would be virtually that of a small division superintendent.

However, she could not help taking a great liking to the bright, cheerful-looking boy, who addressed her as politely as he might a duchess.

He went over the business of the station, as it was and would be later on when the summer travel set in.

The assistant engineer in charge of the extension construction invited him to go over the new track as far as it had been completed, and he remained some time watching the work under way.

When he got back to the Junction he found a letter from Edith awaiting him.

Her letters, as a matter of course, were the chief pleasure of his life, and he read them over almost as many times as the young lady herself read his.

The letter was addressed: "Frederick Sparks, Esq., Acting Supt. Lakeview Branch, Eastern R. R. Co., Cresson Junction," and the superscription looked very important indeed in the eyes of the new official.

As usual it contained several pages of closely-written manuscript, and the wonder was what Edith could find to cover so much good paper with, especially as the young

people now exchanged confidences regularly once every week.

The girl always looked for Fred's letter on a certain day, and if it didn't come until the next her mother always could tell by the expression on her face.

One week she almost had a fit because, owing to some reason, the expected epistle was three days late.

If Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth had hoped that the transfer of Fred from Boston to Cresson Junction would break up the growing attachment between their daughter and the bright boy whose sole capital was energy, ambition and genuine capacity for work of a high order, they were disappointed.

It is quite possible that, with all their gratitude toward the boy, and their personal liking for him, they hardly considered him as a suitable match for their only and much-loved child, whose social standing was among the highest in the Hub.

It may be suspected that when Mrs. Wentworth observed the steady correspondence that ensued between the young people she had a very serious talk with Edith on the subject; but that young lady exercised a despotic sway over her parents, and she had many arguments to advance in Fred's behalf, the chief and most unanswerable of which was that but for her admirer she would probably be under the green turf of the family cemetery plot, instead of continuing as she was the light and sunshine of her home.

At any rate, she was accustomed to having her own way, and as she was fully convinced that she and Fred were made for each other, she was determined that the dear boy should have a fighting chance to win her.

CHAPTER XV.

A WIZARD FOR LUCK.

Before reading Edith's letter, which he was very impatient to do, Fred picked up an official envelope addressed to himself which had come down on the same train from the superintendent's office.

Tearing the end open he took out the contents and read them.

They were fuller and more explicit instructions relative to the conduct of the Lakeview Branch.

It was evident that the company regarded the short line now as something more important than a mere summer road.

Fred, as he read the superintendent's matter-of-fact letter, began to realize in full the growing responsibilities that rested on his young and comparatively inexperienced shoulders.

The company anticipated no failure on his part, and the boy began to wonder if he could continue to give the satisfaction he had done in the past.

When he laid the letter down there was a different expression on his face than had ever rested there before.

He felt as if years had passed over his head.

He was no longer a comparatively care-free lad, to whom the duties of station agent had seemed like second nature, but a man with a weight on his brain.

Edith noticed the change in his answer to her letter.

The eyes of love are quick to perceive the slightest altera-

tion in that subtle essence that, like a wireless telegraph, flows from heart to heart.

As far as words went there was no change in Fred's usual style, but the girl missed something, and she began to ask herself what it was.

It was simply that the boy had ceased to be a boy—a fact she could not understand.

May and June passed and the third of July, an unusually hot day, was at hand.

The Lakeview Branch was in full swing, with two passenger trains running each way daily, and a freight at night.

Fred had his hands tolerably full of business as things were, with a lively anticipation of what would be in store for him when the extension was finished to Bunkport.

So far he had made good right up to the notch.

Everything was running as smoothly as a well regulated machine.

Fred, in consequence, was feeling like a fighting-cock.

No word of commendation had reached him officially from headquarters.

He hardly expected that.

It was sufficient to know that nothing of the reverse order had come to hand.

But he was not left without words of praise and encouragement for all that.

These came in Edith's letters.

Her father had evidently kept himself well informed about the progress of the acting superintendent of the Lakeview Branch, and he had once in awhile mentioned Fred to his daughter in a complimentary way that made the girl's heart glad.

And Edith had reported her father's words to her young lover.

Edith and her mother were to leave Boston on July 3 for their summer outing.

In her last letter, received by Fred that morning, she had stated that fact, but in a seemingly unaccountable way had neglected to give him a hint as to their destination, therefore he could not answer her letter, which he always did at once, until he heard from her again.

It wasn't like the girl to neglect such an essential particular, and Fred was surprised and disappointed that the omission existed.

"Oh, well," he thought, "in the hurry of packing and getting ready to be off she forgot it. When she gets to her hotel wherever they are bound for she'll be looking for the letter that will not come and then—maybe she won't give a scolding in her next."

That's the way Fred excused his little sweetheart.

He looked wistfully at the signature, "Yours lovingly, Edith," and wondered when he would have the pleasure of seeing her.

It was nine months since he parted from her on Washington Street that afternoon when he left Boston to take charge of the station at Cresson Junction, and a whole lot had happened since then.

He wondered, if she could see him now, would she notice any difference in him.

He certainly felt like a different boy—or was he a boy any longer?

He looked in the little looking-glass that hung near his

elbow close to the ticket rack to convince himself that he looked the same as usual.

The hot afternoon sunshine, shining through the open window in front of the telegraph apparatus, flushed his smooth face.

He could not see any change in his customary appearance.

"No, outwardly I'm the same old Fred; but—there's a change, just the same."

At that moment the shrill whistle of a locomotive was borne to his ears.

He hardly needed to glance at the clock to assure himself that that was the Boston and Portland Express which now stopped at the Junction to accommodate the summer travel up the branch.

Fred knew that there would be a mob for Lakeview that afternoon, for the next day was the Fourth.

The hotels had been filling up rapidly during the week, but a large proportion of their patrons came to Lakeview by the Eastern Division, and took the steamer up the lake at Bunkport.

The rest came by way of Cresson Junction.

Fred went out on the platform as the ponderous engine swept past with air-brakes set, and trailing behind it followed the mail, express and baggage cars, the smoker, day coaches, and drawing-room cars.

Frank Jones, the agent, came out behind him.

"President Wentworth's private car is attached to this train," he said. "It'll be dropped here, and I've received orders to see that it's hooked on to the Lakeview train which leaves in ten minutes."

"What!" almost shouted Fred. "The president's car, and it's going to Lakeview?"

The thought flashed across his mind—could that be the destination of Edith and her mother, and the girl hadn't even hinted the fact to him?

He stared after Jones, who was pushing his way down the platform through the streams of alighting passengers bound for Lakeview.

Why hadn't Edith told him?

Didn't she know that it offered her a chance to see him again?

Of course she couldn't help knowing it, then why—

But perhaps, after all, Edith and her mother were not aboard of the car.

Perhaps Mr. Wentworth had loaned the car to a party of his friends.

Well, he would go and see who were on the car.

It was his duty as well as the agent's to see that the car was attached to the Lakeview train.

As he passed down the platform he saw a vision of loveliness, in white attire, standing on the front platform of the private car.

His heart began to beat faster, for he was willing to swear that was Edith.

He hurried his steps, for he saw she was looking for someone, and who ought that someone to be but himself?

In another moment she singled him out and began waving her handkerchief at him.

He wanted to break into a run, but he felt that would be an undignified proceeding on the part of the acting superintendent of the Lakeview Branch, so he walked forward as fast as he could.

"Fred, you dear, dear boy," she cried, as he sprang up the steps and caught her by the hand.

"Edith, this is a great surprise to me. You never——"

"Told you? I wanted to surprise you," she cried, with flushed face and dancing eyes.

"Well, you've done it, all right. How well you look," he said, looking at her with mingled admiration and love.

"Do I? And you—you haven't changed a bit, except you look manlier and handsomer than ever," she added, demurely.

"Thank you, Edith, you said that very nicely," he laughed, and there was a happy ring to the laugh. "You don't know how glad I am to see you."

"Are you really?" she said, laying her gloved hand caressingly on his arm. "Are you really and truly glad to see——"

"My little sweetheart! Well, I guess I am!"

She blushed like a June rose and smiled coyly in his face.

The express pulled out at that moment, leaving the private car standing on the main track.

"Come inside and see mamma," said Edith, stepping toward the door.

Mrs. Wentworth greeted Fred very kindly.

"We are going to Lakeview to spend the summer," she said. "Edith wouldn't listen to any other place, so I had to agree."

"Why Lakeview, Edith?" asked Fred, mischievously.

"Can't you guess?" she said, with a smile and a blush.

Fred thought he could, but he didn't say so.

The Lakeview train now backed down the track and the private car was coupled on.

"All aboard!" sang out the conductor.

"That means I've got to drop out," said Fred, extending his hand first to Mrs. Wentworth and then to the girl.

"Isn't it a shame!" cried Edith. "But you'll be up tomorrow, won't you? We're going to stop at the Lakeview. Remember, I'll look for you."

"I'll be up in the afternoon, and I guess I can manage to stop over," he said as the train began to move. "Good-bye till then."

He jumped off and watched the flutter of a handkerchief as long as he could see it.

He kept his word, and called at the Lakeview Hotel at five next day.

He dined with Edith and her mother, and then he and the girl went out for a walk together to watch the fireworks.

They had a great deal to say to each other which wouldn't interest the reader, but which was extremely interesting to their two selves.

These tete-a-tetes were continued at frequent intervals all through the summer nights, and when the first of September came around, and Edith had to return to Boston, they parted with mutual regret.

Their last night together both remembered a long time.

"You know I love you, Edith, and I know you love me, isn't it so?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, softly.

"Then why deny me one kiss at parting?" he asked, wistfully.

"Because the gulf is not yet spanned, dear. When you can go to papa and mamma and ask them for me, and they give their consent, then I will be wholly yours, and you may

kiss me; but until then you must be patient, for though my heart is yours my hand is yet to be won. It is up to you to win it."

On Christmas week the first train ran through from the Junction to Bunkport, and now Fred was no longer designated as the acting superintendent, but the superintendent of the Lakeview & Bunkport Branch.

And did he fill the bill?

Well, rather, for he was fighting for a dainty prize in Life's Lottery, and he was determined to win, be the odds what they might.

During the year that followed Fred built the branch line up in a way that won the hearty commendation of the general superintendent and President Wentworth.

He was evidently the right person in the right place, but he was too useful an employee to be kept on a branch line when an opening of division superintendent occurred.

On his twenty-first birthday he was put in charge of the Eastern Division of the road, and a year later was transferred to the Portland Division of the main line.

After nine months' service he was shifted to the Boston Division, with an office in the depot building where he had first begun his career of railroading in the Claim Department.

These shifts had all been made for a purpose, and at the instigation of President Wentworth.

It was to make him familiar with the whole system, for Mr. Wentworth, having weighed him in the balance and found him full weight, determined he should eventually succeed Mr. Lamport as general superintendent of the road.

It was not expected that he would attain this office for some years, but here Fred's luck again came in play—Mr. Lamport was found dead in his office one afternoon, a victim of heart failure, and thus at the age of twenty-five Fred Sparks became virtual head of the Eastern Railroad.

Then he went to Mr. Wentworth and asked him for Edith's hand.

Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth had long accepted this as a foregone conclusion, and so the answer was favorable.

Then Edith placed her hand in his and said:

"The gulf is spanned at last, and I am wholly yours. Now you may kiss me."

And thus Fred won both fame and fortune—fame as the best superintendent the Eastern road ever had, and fortune with Edith, for she was an heiress to a million.

When their marriage was noted at length in the Boston papers the clerks of the Claim Department who had known him as a fellow worker said with one accord that Fred Sparks was certainly "A Wizard for Luck."

THE END.

Read "A FORTUNE AT STAKE; OR, A WALL STREET MESSENGER'S DEAL," which will be the next number (128) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

Military music in the French army is getting into a very low condition. The two years' service system hit the regimental bands very hard in taking away from them one-half of their strength every year. Efficient bandmasters, however, and hard work might have counteracted this. But now the supply of bandmasters is threatened. These were provided by means of annual competitions among army bandmen for positions of master and assistant master, but for two years now these examinations have not been held, and already there are more than fifty regiments which, whatever they may still have in the way of a band, have certainly no recognized bandmaster. The annual competitions used, it appears, to be conducted by the Conservatoire, which since 1905 has made one plea or other for neglecting them.

To those who conceive of Alaska as a place of cold and hardship and privation there will be an element of surprise in the advice of Dr. Henry Gannett, of the United States Geological Survey: "If you are old, go by all means; but if you are young, wait." Mr. Gannett gives this reason for his advice: "The scenery of Alaska is much grander than anything else of the kind in the world, and it is not well to dull one's capacity for enjoyment by seeing the finest sights first." Visitors to the Jamestown exhibition had a chance to study an interesting relief map of Alaska, which was part of the government exhibit. It has been constructed as if it were a part of a globe sixteen feet in diameter. The scale is but a little more than forty miles to the inch, and the relief gives a prominence and distinctness to the elevations and depressions which a flat map cannot impart.

A great deal of interest has been centered in "coalite," and numbers have called at the exhibition of it in Newcastle to see this coalite burning in the grate and hear about its remarkable properties as a house fuel. It is a bright, hard substance, very similar in appearance to the best coke, and in burning it makes no smoke and gives off, it is claimed, something like twice the heat of coal, while a coalite fire lasts 40 per cent. longer than an ordinary coal fire. This coalite is produced by a process similar to that employed by the gas companies for the production of coke. In the case of the gas companies, coal is treated at a high temperature, the gas and by-products being collected and the residue being coke, but by the coalite process the coal is treated at a much lower temperature, with the result that the gas obtained is much richer. The by-products are also richer, and the residue, instead of being coke, is coalite, which can be easily lighted, and burns with great steadiness and economy. For household purposes it appears to have a special value, in virtue of its cleanliness and its heating power. This is now

fully recognized in London, where the prospect of abating the smoke and fog nuisance is hailed with no small satisfaction.

Has any one ever wondered why the number four is invariably written as IIII on the dials of clocks, while everywhere else in Roman characters it appears as IV? About 1370 Henry Vick, one of the first makers of clocks, produced an elaborate clock much resembling those of to-day, and gave it to Charles V of France, who was called the Wise. Charles was not a learned man, and was proud and inordinately sensitive on some subjects. He accepted the clock, and shortly afterward Vick appeared at the court to see how the timepiece was running. "Yes," said the King, "the clock runs well"; but being anxious to find some fault with a thing he knew nothing about, he continued: "The only trouble is that you have got the figures on the dial wrong." "In what respect, Your Majesty?" asked Vick. "Why, stupid," replied the King, "that four should be four ones." "I think Your Majesty is wrong," said Vick. "I am never wrong!" thundered the monarch. "Take it away and correct the error." Vick took the clock and, not daring to disobey his royal patron, changed the Roman numerals IV to IIII, and to this day the change remains.

RIB TICKLERS.

"I understand your brother is a great hunter." "Great! I should say so! Why, he can't go in the Maine woods now; he's shot so many guides there."

"Do you know that a gaseous emanation from radium is transformed into helium, Miss Elderly?" "No, Mr. Jinks. I'll just bet you're talking love to me in Latin."

Bacon—Has he been successful with his new airship? Egbert—Partially so. He goes "up in the air" every time he tries to start the thing.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" "Don't stop me, for goodness' sake! I am going to my boss' funeral, and there is nothing he hates so much as unpunctuality."

She (sternly)—Why were you so late last night? He (apologetically)—I was held up on my way home— She (still sternly)—Were you too far gone to walk alone?

Puffer—Do you suppose we can get a drink at this house? Chuffer—Of course we can. Puffer—What makes you so sure? Chuffer—Look at those automobiles standing outside.

"Pop!" "Yes, my son." "What is a nom de plume?" "Why, it is a man's pen name, my boy." "Well, pop, that's not the name you call your fountain-pen when it won't work!"

They met face to face at a seaside resort. "Let me see," the young man said. "Miss—er—wasn't I engaged to you once?" "Twice," answered the young woman, bowing coldly and passing on.

When Russell was with the German Army in 1870 he reported a long interview with the Crown Prince (Frederick), some expressions in which gave umbrage to Bismarck. Bismarck sent for him, lost his temper and said: "I suppose you couldn't resist showing your importance by reporting all that that 'dunderhead' confided to you?" Russell replied: "Your Excellency knows that I always respect confidence; there is much that you have said to me yourself that I have not reported." Bismarck: "Pouf! Anything I say to you you may bawl from the top of St. Paul's!" "I thank your Excellency," said Russell. "I shall use that permission to record your opinion of the Crown Prince."

THE SCARLET SEAL

By John Sherman.

A case which presented some novel features was placed in my hands about two years ago.

A young English variety actress had been persecuted by anonymous communications of a blackmailing nature, and she had sent for me to unravel the mystery and bring the offender to justice.

The young lady, whom I will call Miss Cora Candice, was an uncommonly handsome brunette of a vivacious countenance and a magnificent figure.

She was quite popular in variety rôles, and commanded an unusually large salary; but money, however, did not appear to be the prime object of the mysterious and threatening letters.

It had begun with little notes of admiration, asking interviews; and these she had, of course, ignored.

Then, the epistles had become more lengthy, the writer hinting that he had in his possession certain information which it would be to her interest to know, and demanding that she meet him as he appointed.

Finally, as she disregarded these demands, her unknown persecutor had declared that he held the most damaging evidence against her, and that he would only suppress it for a consideration—naming a large amount!

There was no signature whatever to any one of these extraordinary letters, the last of which was insolent and menacing to the most audacious degree.

The paper and envelope invariably used were of the ordinary square, cream-laid quality; the penmanship was coarse and rude.

The only thing particularly noticeable about the letters was the manner of the sealing. In each instance a round, flat seal of scarlet wax was pressed upon the point of the envelope flap, and bore the singular impression of a skull and cross-bones.

"You have no suspicion as to who the writer might be?" I said to her.

She answered that she had not the slightest. The whole affair was an entire mystery to her; if he were not detected she feared something worse than mere annoyance would be attempted; in fact, she was terrified, and believed her life to be in danger.

I assured her I would do all in my power to track her unknown persecutor, and so left her.

I felt pretty fairly certain that the remarkable scarlet seal was a clew which, sooner or later, would be the means of identifying him.

From the size of the sinister impression I judged it had been made from an intaglio stone worn probably in a ring.

And the wearer I did not doubt I should eventually discover loitering about the theatre where she was playing.

A professional matter of a previous arrangement prevented me from pursuing my investigations in the direction of the theatre that same evening. And early the next morning I was surprised by an urgent summons from the house where the young actress was stopping.

I started at once, and upon my arrival learned that Miss Candice had been the victim of as daring a robbery as has ever been perpetrated.

Immediately after her departure for the theatre on the evening before, a supposed expressman had called for her trunks.

He stated that she had secured another boarding-house, and produced a note purporting to be from her, to the same effect.

As her week had expired, and as she had mentioned an intention of making such a change, no suspicion was excited, and her trunks were transferred to the custody of the man bearing the note.

Upon her return a scene of confusion naturally ensued.

She knew nothing of the man nor the note, and had authorized nobody to remove her baggage.

But the strangest and most audacious part of the robbery was yet to come.

Of course it was too late to do much that night in the way of overtaking the daring thief, and the inmates of the house retired.

In the morning Miss Candice did not respond to the breakfast bell; all calling and rapping had failed to elicit from her the slightest answer.

The door was forced open, and she was found lying stupefied upon the bed, and her room was filled with the faint odor of some anesthetic.

The chamber had been entered from a rear window which was only about fifteen feet from the ground, and the burglar, beyond a doubt, had retreated by the same way, and so through a door of the garden wall into an adjoining alley.

He had taken with him a satchel which contained a valuable set of genuine diamonds and other jewels; also her watch, purse, and a rich seal cloak.

Unless her property could be recovered, the unfortunate young actress would be without money or wardrobe.

She was seriously ill from the effects of the drug, and half-distracted over her losses.

Her dread of her anonymous persecutor had quite passed from her mind in the grave trouble which had befallen her. She was sick, penniless; she would be compelled to cancel her engagements.

"The thief cannot hope to escape apprehension; I think we shall be able to recover the most of your property," I told her.

I questioned them as to the appearance of the man who brought the note.

He was a young fellow, neither tall nor short, stout nor thin—they told me. But they had observed that his clothing was of good material and scrupulously neat; and his countenance struck them as being the reverse of shrewd.

His assistant was a big, muscular man whose features were concealed by a battered slouch hat, and who wore a soiled brown checked jumper.

The wagon was a long, light, open vehicle, drawn by a single gray horse.

I traced the wagon easily for a certain distance.

A patrolman on his beat a few blocks away had remembered noticing the wagon, and he had recognized the young man of the scrupulously neat appearance.

The young fellow was known as Mooney Marks. He was the son of a moderately well-to-do family; he occupied himself chiefly in sauntering around town, and his associates were of anything but the best.

He was regarded as a harmless kind of youth, good-natured and rather simple-minded; and he had never been accused of any real evil-doing.

I had no difficulty in finding him; but if his version of his connection with the matter was true, the mystery was only deepened.

According to his story the big, muscular man was responsible for the whole affair.

Mooney claimed he had never seen the fellow before that night.

The man had hailed him as he was passing, and asked him to assist with the removal of the trunks.

"The gov'nor had just refused me a V, and I hadn't a dime left," he said. "The fellow tossed me a bill and asked me to give him a lift. I took the note in while he was fixing the wagon. Everything appeared square enough; if there is something crooked I don't know anything about it."

A few blocks from the house the man had dismissed him.

Whither the property had been removed he claimed he did not know.

But whether he knew or not, I felt obliged to take Mooney into custody.

Whether he were guilty or not he had not afforded me the slightest clew to the identity of the man in the check jumper, nor to the place where the stolen property might have been conveyed.

"I think I've got the note yet," Mooney suddenly remarked, as he was walking with me to the police-station.

He fumbled for a moment through his pockets, and presently drew forth a crumpled folded paper.

I could scarcely repress an exclamation as my eyes fell upon it.

The penmanship, partially disguised by smaller characters, was, even to an untrained eye, exactly that of the threatening letters sent to the young actress.

To penetrate the mystery of the scarlet seal would be to find the thief.

But days and weeks passed, and I was forced to admit that I had not struck the trail.

In the meantime Mooney remained in prison, and there he would have been to this day, without doubt, but for an accidental discovery.

Miss Candice had given up all hopes of ever recovering her property, and she was about leaving the city.

A young English gentleman to whom she was betrothed had arrived from London; he had a sister residing in Havana; Miss Candice was to sail thither by the first steamer; her lover was to follow her by the next, when their marriage was to be consummated.

I had not the smallest intention of discontinuing my investigations.

I knew that sooner or later the daring villain must necessarily be unearthed.

I wished to see Miss Candice again before her departure, but I reached her boarding-house to learn that she had just been driven down to the steamer.

I followed her at once, and reached the wharf at the moment she and her lover alighted from their carriage.

As I stepped forward, a large man pushed through the crowd, elbowed his way past me, and thrust himself before them.

"Perhaps this young woman will settle a few bills I hold before she leaves the city," he began roughly, as he exhibited some kind of a legal-looking paper.

He was an individual of a most forbidding aspect, swarthy as a Moor, with a bristling shock of jet-black hair. And at the instant his black eyes blazed savagely beneath his beetle brows.

The young actress started back, and with a little scream of terror clung tightly to the arm of her lover.

That young gentleman was prompt to resent what he regarded as an indignity.

"What do you mean by frightening a lady!" the gentleman flashed forth, dealing an indignant blow which sent the forbidding individual reeling backward. "You have mistaken the person."

"If I have mistaken the person, I shall not be mistaken in paying for this insult," the man almost yelled as he squared himself for a fight.

As he made ready for a rush upon the companion of the terrified young actress, he had involuntarily thrust the legal-looking paper into an inner pocket.

In doing so he dislodged some object which fluttered down almost to my feet.

I uttered an ejaculation of astonishment as I picked it up.

It was a letter addressed in the anonymous penmanship to Miss Cora Candice, and the envelope flap was fastened with the sinister scarlet seal.

In an instant I had collared him, and had the muzzle of my revolver before his eyes.

But he was not captured without a desperate struggle.

Twice he broke away, swinging his fists right and left like sledge-hammers as he lunged through the crowd on the pier, and of course I dared not use my revolver in so crowded a space.

He was like a wild bison at bay.

But finally somebody tripped him scientifically among the throng and he fell heavily, striking with terrible violence upon a pile of chains.

Miss Candice did not leave for Havana that day. Her presence was essential in the charge I made against my extraordinary prisoner.

Realizing that he was trapped and could expect no leniency, he made a sullen confession.

He was an ex-convict from some foreign prison.

He had conceived a mad passion for the young variety ac-

tress, and when she ignored his first billets of admiration he had pursued her with the savage persistence of a passion stung by jealousy and revenge.

He had robbed her, partly because he was in a strait for money, and thought the robbery could be accomplished without detection, and partly because he hoped somehow to get her into his power ultimately.

When he learned she was on the eve of departure and marriage, he had trumped up a bill of some kind, which he hoped might detain her until he could menace or persuade her to listen to his addresses.

The man was not mad, but he was certainly a monomaniac on one subject—and that subject was the fascinating Cora Candice!

She recovered the most of her property, and was shortly afterward married to her English lover.

The persecutor ended his own worthless life in his cell before he was brought to trial.

Young Mooney Marks was honorably released.

His gratification at the termination of the remarkable case was scarcely greater than my own.

Almost from the first I had thought him innocent, and I had feared he was doomed to suffer the penalty of another's guilt—as he very likely would have done but for the clew of the scarlet seal!

Norway now has twenty leper hospitals and each is situated in some country town and accommodates from ten to fifteen patients. The lepers live as a big family in these hospitals and are well cared for.

A brood of seven chickens, being refused attention by their parent, have found a foster mother in a tortoise-shell cat at the poultry farm of Mrs. Wilks at Bulwell, Nottingham, England. When they were hatched, Mrs. Wilks brought them into an outhouse, placing them in a wire-fronted box. They had not been in their new home many hours before the cat joined them in the box, playing with them as though they were kittens, and acting the part of foster mother.

The Emperor of Austria belongs to that category of persons who throughout their lives never even suffer from headache. The approach of age is not visible. This miracle may be explained by his manner of life. The Emperor, who formerly smoked ten to fifteen strong Havana cigars daily, now contents himself with two light ones; he drinks daily about two glasses of beer and some light wine; he sleeps much, when great care is taken that cold is avoided. His Majesty has lost only three teeth.

A few weeks ago, in a southwestern State, a mob of several hundred men gathered to break down the doors of a county jail and take a man out and hang him. The sheriff got together eight men with rifles to resist the mob, but the guard would have been overpowered but for the wit of a boy of twelve. He got a dozen skyrockets from a store, laid them on the ground in a vacant lot with their ends pointed toward the crowd, and then lighted the fuses. For the next five minutes there was jumping and dodging and yelling and running, and when the sparks had got through flying there was no crowd left.

The interesting fact that it may be warmer in the Arctic regions than in Britain was illustrated by a telegram received recently from Tromsø, more than 200 miles within the Arctic Circle. It was therein stated that the temperature was 70 degrees in the shade. In London about the same time it was 56 degrees. And in the earlier part of the year there were occasions when the temperature of Iceland was higher than that of Britain. A still more remarkable state of affairs occurs when that strange warm wind known as the Föhn blows down from the ice and snow in Greenland. Then in midwinter, during the long Arctic night, extensive thaws may occur, and for several consecutive days it may be warmer in Northern Greenland than in Southern France.

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